

Sex offender pushes for classification reforms

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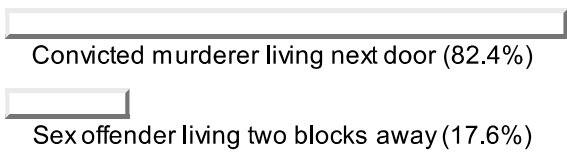
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Sex offender speaks

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What do you fear more?



BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (WIAT) - When it comes to a threat of our children nothing raises a red flag like the threat of a sex offender living in our community.

In the last 20 years penalties for sex offenders and laws restricting their movements have grown exponentially.

It's something Derek Logue is fighting. "We still have a far long way to go to determine who is a high risk and who isn't."

Logue uses himself as the ultimate example. In 2001, he was convicted of sexual abuse of an 11-year old girl.

But he says it was an isolated incident and he's no threat to the general public. "I'm not out reoffending... I've been out for 10 years and I haven't reoffended haven't been accused of reoffending and it's not enough to satisfy society. They judge me on something I did in my college years and I'm a middle aged man now."

Janette Grantham and Miriam Shehane say "big deal."They are victims rights advocates.

Through their non-profit organization VOCAL, Victims of Crimes and Leniency, they stand up for victims who cannot or will not stand up for themselves.

Neither has any sympathy for a man who served just 25 months of a six year sentence for his crime.

Grantham says victims aren't so lucky. "It stays with them. If they could serve two years or three years and then they could go on with their life that would be great. But they can never go on with their lives because they are never the same again."

But Logue argues he has paid his penance. He believes the restrictions he and others like him are forced to live under a decade after their release from prison are punitive.

"You send them to prison, they're glorified dog cages. You incapacitate them for years and years they develop no skills they

get no treatment when they're in there and when they get out of prison. You deny them housing, you deny them a support network, you deny them jobs. I was homeless for a while."

Logue attributes the homelessness and the fact that he is not working to his status as a sex offender. "I have a degree, I should be out working, but society fears me so much that most people won't hire me because of the label. You're a sex offender."

Logue takes issue with the sex offender database. He says it was intended to allow law enforcement to have a private list to check up on when a child goes missing... But changes in law have made the database public.

Where Logue takes issue there is no classification in Alabama making it impossible for people to determine who is and is not a threat.

Says Logue, "We feel like we have to rely on some list that can't differentiate between a drunken mooner and a pedophile to make a determination on a person's character. You can't judge my character based on a list."

Jefferson County District Attorney Brandon Falls admits the system is flawed. And legislators are working to find a way to better classify and identify who is a danger to society. But Falls says the subject is not a black and white issue.

"It's very delicate trying to create a law that everyone will agree with. The question becomes, should that be required for the rest of their lives? And, every situation is different."

But victim's advocates have a much simpler solution.

Janette Grantham suggests, "All they have to do if they don't want to be burdened with a sex offender label on their driver's license and everywhere they go, then don't commit the crime."

Miriam Shehane adds "everybody has choices. And you better think about that. What choices you make in life... there are consequences."