

Residency restriction laws for sex offenders simply don't work

In actuality, they make things more dangerous, something one small Maine town should consider in possibly adopting its own ordinance.

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The small town of Nobleboro, pop. 1,750, is currently considering passing an ordinance restricting where persons forced to register on a public sex offense registry can live. [In the words of former Kansas Corrections Secretary Roger Werholz](#), “They don’t work, and they actually make things more dangerous rather than make them safer.”

Sex offense restrictions were designed in response to “stranger danger.” But most sex crimes occur at home, by someone known to the

victim. Most sex crime arrests are of people with no prior record. In 2023, there were only [855 reported sex offense victims](#) out of 1.4 million residents of Maine; of those, only 154 victims were under age 18. Most of them occurred at a residence, not a school, park or playground. Around 82% were committed by friends, family members and intimate partners. Only 42 cases involved strangers.

Furthermore, a Maine study found that very few persons convicted of sex offenses are ever rearrested for a new offense; [one Maine study](#) found only 3.5% of registered persons are rearrested for a sex offense after three years and 5% after five years. Most simply do not commit new offenses. The longer someone is out, the less likely that person will reoffend.

While Maine doesn't list which sex crime arrests involve those previously convicted of a sexual offense, a study in New York found that around 95% of sex crime arrests involve a person with no prior sex offense history. Residency restrictions merely drive registered persons underground and increase the likelihood of homelessness. It has been estimated that around 4.8% of Maine's registered persons are transient.

[Waldoboro recently passed](#) a 2,500-foot residency restriction. In South Florida, where 2,500-foot

restrictions are the norm, a third of Broward and Miami-Dade's registrant population are transient. If plastering a person's past convictions on a government blacklist is important to you, then you will be shocked to discover that homeless registrants are simply harder to monitor. Of course, where a person sleeps at night, when schools, parks and playgrounds are closed, does not determine waking activities even if a particular registered person posed a risk to the public.

In the Nobleboro Select Board's [June 17 minutes](#), it was noted that town officials were looking into passing a municipal ordinance because they want to have their own version of Waldoboro's ordinance. "Monkey see, monkey do" is never good public policy. Waldoboro's recently passed "sex offender residency restrictions ordinance" actually [violates state law](#) and the community will eventually be sued for millions, and rightfully so.

The state of Kansas passed a moratorium against residency restriction laws, and Maine should do the same. As former Kansas Corrections Secretary Roger Werholz once said, "What we want to do is not so much what makes us feel safer, but what makes us safer. It's not what the sex offender deserves. It's what we deserve and we deserve to live in a community and a state where our kids are as safe as possible. Residency restrictions does not deliver that."