



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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Sex Offender Registry Protects Missourians

Governments are ultimately responsible for the safety of their citizens. In an effort to protect Missourians from sexual predators, the state of Missouri over the past several years has passed laws increasing penalties against sex offenders. One of those laws required the names and addresses of sex offenders be posted on the Internet.

In 2003, the General Assembly and governor approved legislation allowing the state's sex offender registry to be posted online by the Missouri State Highway Patrol. Additional information also can be obtained from the sheriff's office of the county where the sex offender resides. Many local sheriffs' offices also maintain sex offender registries.

This legislation was necessary to inform parents of threats to the safety of their children so they can take protective measures. Clearly, if there is a child molester living next to a family with children, the guardians of those children should have the right to know about that nearby threat.

However, we need to make sure this list does not display the names, and ruin the reputations, of individuals who have committed minor infractions but are still labeled sex offenders. Child molesters, rapists and others who commit forceful sex acts are the ones who need to be identified online. However, the sex offender label can be used for individuals who have slipped through the cracks of the legal system. This could include teenagers who have made mistakes, but pose no threat to society.

The sex offender registry is a good law to provide needed information for Missouri residents, but we need to ensure it does not hurt the sorts of people it is supposed to help — loving families.

To see the sex offender registry, go to the Missouri State Highway Patrol's Web site at www.mshp.dps.missouri.gov and click on the "Sex Offender Registry" tab at the top of the screen.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by email at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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