



From the House...

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Fixing a Broken List

"Rep. Day what are you doing coddling sex offenders? I just heard where you went to a meeting full of registered sex offenders and said that you would be standing up for them! I am going to tell the entire community what you are up to; you have to clarify your position." That was a recent call I received in my office, of course no name or number was left for me to reply to, otherwise I would have.

Since I did receive this call I thought I would share with you just want I am up to in regard to the Sex Offender Registry. Last year we worked on a bill that my good friend Rep. Rodney Schad sponsored and I proudly supported, it was HB 999.

The meeting I attended and spoke at in St. Louis was made up of a group of individuals that who, like me, feel the current Sex Offender Registry laws are broken and they are trying to reform them. My purpose at the meeting was to visit with them about working with elected officials and lobbying them, something I have done with several groups in the state.

What last session's HB 999 would have done is simply recognize the difference between a true sex offender and someone who makes a dumb mistake at a young age or even can almost be an innocent bystander. I will try to explain what I mean by that.

We all know what a true sex offender is, the really bad people that often prey on children, sometimes in a violent manner and often in repeated fashion. Trust me, nobody in the Missouri Legislature, of any political affiliation, wants to coddle or give these people a break. Actually HB 999 would have increased the penalty for many of them, as I think it should be.

But what do I mean by young people making dumb mistakes? There are many people currently on the registry that at the age of 19 or 20 had a relationship with someone a few years younger than them, which then qualifies them to be put on the registry. Now if the incident was an issue that involved violence, that is one thing and not what I am talking about. However, often it is a situation where two young people want to be together, maybe one was less than honest about their age, whatever the circumstance it was consensual. Today we have those then 19 or 20 year olds on the Sex Offender Registry, meaning at the age of 35 they can't even take their kids to a ball game because other kids are there.

Or how about the person who is sent an inappropriate photo to their cell phone, not necessarily knowing who the photo is of or even who sent it, maybe they received it by mistake and someone found out. They are now candidates for the registry and there are examples of individuals on there because of such situations.

These are just a couple of examples of where a law that has great intentions has become out of control in my opinion. Not only does it destroy lives of individuals that don't need this kind of life-long punishment, but it also costs taxpayers huge

amounts of money. These individuals often can't get jobs, they are restricted on where they can live, all of the things that will often put them on public assistance because they can't provide for themselves. The system is broken.

All HB 999 does, and all this group I visited with in St. Louis wants, is a system that recognizes the difference between true violent sex offenders and a young man or woman that just makes a dumb mistake. It allows for an effective appeal process after a number of years and does not treat all offenders the exact same, because not all offenses are the same. They would still be punished, but is a life-long sentence truly appropriate for someone that makes a mistake at the age of 19 or 20? Someone who has never committed such an act before and has not since? I don't think so.

So...regardless if you agree or disagree with me, I wanted to let you know where I stand on the issue and what we are working on...in case the same guy who can't leave his name and number decides to call you too.

Last year HB 999 passed out of the House with only 16 "No" votes, but never received floor time in the Senate because of it being so late in session. Our hope is to have it moving much quicker next session and try to fix a system that in my opinion is a broken one.

As always, please feel free to contact me anytime I can be of service. My office number is (573) 751-1446 and my e-mail address is david.day@house.mo.gov.