

Testimony

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. I would like to start by acknowledging that sexually based offenses, especially those involving children, instill great fear in the public. I understand the concerns and hesitation of appearing "soft" on these types of offenders, and the motivation of protecting the public by having and enforcing laws concerning reporting requirements.

However, currently, these laws merely offer the public a false sense of security. The sex offender registry protects the public from known offenders of sexually based crimes. However, it does not protect the public against non-sexually based offenders or potential sex offenders who are not yet known to the system. Unfortunately, sexually based crimes are more common with someone who is known to the victim, such as close friends or family than it is a "stranger" who happens to live down the street.

Sexually based crimes are viewed as being more severe than drug related charges, and even more dangerous than murder. The general public as well as law-enforcement and lawmakers have labeled sex offenders as being unredeemable, and therefore unable to be rehabilitated. Sadly, this over generalization of sex offenders becomes a self fulfilling prophecy because the current laws limit sex offenders's ability to actually fully integrate back into society.

One of our core beliefs is for everyone to be a productive and contributing member of society who also gives back to their communities. However, sex offenders struggle to just survive let alone to thrive in this way.

According to leading psychologists, individuals struggling with unwanted sexual behaviors do so because of the lack of purpose in their lives and these psychologist stress the importance of having a strong community support system. I recently had the opportunity to speak with a sitting federal judge on this topic. His recommendation for successful reentry included finding a community support system as well as volunteering.

Unfortunately, most of the time it is a struggle for sex offenders to merely find a place to live, to work, and to even feel welcome at churches or other community activities let alone participate in any volunteer opportunities.

They are permanently an outsider looking in on a society that doesn't want them in their neighborhoods and doesn't want them in their community. Unfortunately, this reaffirms their belief that they are unwanted, which is one of the contributing factors that led them to their sex offense to

begin with, thus reinforcing their likelihood of going back to that behavior and therefore re-offending. The better outcome for a successful integration back into society is to offer engagement, encouragement and support instead of more condemnation and shame. Which only perpetuates the cycle.

The saying is a cliché, but it is also true, that hurt people hurt people. Someone lacking control over their own life is more likely to compulsively try to control someone else's life. What is more hurtful than feeling like you don't belong anywhere? What feels more out of control than not being able to find a job, housing, or to even know where your next meal is coming from?

This by no means diminishes their responsibility or the severity of their crimes. It is, however, meant to illustrate the difficulties of their current situation. Their past choices inevitably lead them down a path that resulted in hurting others to which they served their sentence and now it's time for a new, healthier, life.

A few years ago, I took part in a post-incarceration simulation. This exercise was meant to show the difficulties that individuals leaving prison face. At the end of this exercise, a vast majority of the individuals participating found themselves to be back in "jail" because the required tasks were seemingly impossible to complete. Undoubtedly, that was the goal of the exercise. However, I don't think it's that far from the truth. Which raises the question, are the current reporting requirements an unrealistic expectation set up in order to keep sex offenders incarcerated, and therefore away from the public?

Understandably, society wants sex offenders to take full responsibility for their actions. However, eliminating excuses and removing barriers such as being able to find gainful employment, safe housing, being able to fully engage in community service projects in order to give back to society and possibly even finding a local church family to belong to will allow for greater and more sustainable accountability and therefore success going forward.

Thank you for your time today. I would like to close with this . . .

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him 'Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink when did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go visit you?' 'Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me. . . whatever you did not do for one of the least of these. You did

not do it for me."

Matthew 25: 35, 37, 45