

Zero evidence to support residency restrictions

written by NARSOL | August 25, 2014

By Jesse Singal . . . On Thursday, Joseph Goldstein of the *New York Times* reported that “Dozens of sex offenders who have satisfied their sentences in New York State are being held in prison beyond their release dates because of a new interpretation of a state law that governs where they can live.” In short, since 2005, sex offenders in the state can’t live within 1,000 feet of a school, and a February ruling from the state’s Department of Corrections and Community Supervision extended that restriction to homeless shelters.

Because the onus is on sex offenders to find approved housing before they’re released, Goldstein reported, they’ve been left with very few options, especially in densely-populated New York City, where there are schools everywhere. This has led to an uncomfortable legal limbo and sparked at least one lawsuit (so far) on behalf of an offender who is still in custody even though he was supposed to be out by now.

The unfortunate thing about this situation is that laws designed to restrict where sex offenders can live are really and truly useless, except as a means of politicians scoring easy political points by ratcheting up hysteria. There are many tricky social-scientific issues on which there are a range of opinions and some degree of debate among experts, but this isn’t one of them. Among those whose job it is to figure out how to reduce the rate at which sex offenders commit crimes (as opposed to those whose job it is to get reelected, in part by hammering away at phantom threats), there is zero controversy: These laws don’t work, and may actually *increase* sexual offenders’ recidivism rates. ([see Science of US for full story](#))