

Columbus Dispatch declares boldly, courageously, correctly

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By John Futtly . . . After his conviction for attempted rape in 2011, Brian L. Golsby was required to participate in a sex-offender treatment program in prison.

The specific program he entered, how he performed and whether he was seen as a high risk for re-offending, though, are all confidential under Ohio law.

Whatever treatment Golsby received, police say it didn't stop him from the Feb. 8 abduction, rape and slaying of Reagan Tokes, a 21-year-old Ohio State University student. Golsby has been linked to the crime through DNA that was on file from his previous conviction.

Tokes' death occurred three months after Golsby, 29, was released from prison for that 2011 attack, in which he was accused of forcing a woman to perform oral sex at knifepoint in a Grove City parking lot.

The Golsby case represents the public's worst fears about

convicted sex offenders – that they don't respond to treatment and will strike again if released.

But those are myths, reinforced whenever such cases get extensive media coverage, said Melissa Hamilton, a law professor who has written extensively about sex offenders.

"These incredibly horrible stories occur, the media picks them up and the public reacts," she said. "It stokes fears of sex offenders as people who are likely to re-offend. But the statistics don't support it."

Hamilton, a visiting criminal-law scholar at the University of Houston Law Center, said one of the most comprehensive studies on sex offenders was issued by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2003. It tracked more than 9,000 sex offenders released from prisons in 15 states, including Ohio, in 1994. Three years after their release, 5.3 percent of the offenders had been arrested for another sex crime.

"I wouldn't characterize that as high-risk," Hamilton said.

The sex offenders who were most likely to offend again were men whose victims were boys, not adults, the study found.

Two years ago, Ohio prison statistics showed that 11 percent of released sex offenders returned to prison on sex charges, compared with a recidivism rate of 28.7 percent for all inmates.

The Justice Department study made a similar finding: "Sex offenders in the study had a lower overall re-arrest rate than non-sex offenders."

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