

# NARSOL's chairman to give testimony against civil commitment, mandatory minimums

written by Sandy | June 22, 2018



By Sandy . . . [In this piece](#) I presented the situation of Wayne Chapman, a convicted sexual offender in Massachusetts who is due to be released from a ten-year term of civil commitment that he served following the thirty-year prison sentence that he served for his crime.

In response to this situation, the governor of Massachusetts is proposing what he terms an “emergency law, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, safety and convenience.” Titled “[An act relative to child predators](#),” this law if passed will accomplish two things. It will, first, change the process by which a person may be released from civil commitment so that the testimony of two, independent, state-sanctioned medical professionals that the person in question poses no risk to the community will no longer suffice

to effect the release. Secondly, it will create new mandatory minimum sentences of life without parole for certain sexual crimes.

The Boston Globe, [in this editorial](#), throws its full support in favor of the proposed legislation.

An emergency hearing has been called for Tuesday, June 26 to consider the bill. NARSOL's chairman Paul Shannon, along with others, will testify against the bill at the hearing; additionally, he sent this letter to the editor of a local newspaper.

*To the Editor:*

*I hope that the public will show good sense and see the Governor's sexual offense bill for the disaster that it would be. It would neither increase public safety nor fairness.*

*First, the research clearly shows that people convicted of sexual offenses have a very low rate of recidivism. And yet this bill would fill the gulag at the Bridgewater Treatment Center by subjecting many more people who have finished their sentence – and who now pose low or no risk of re-offense – to long or lifetime civil commitment: not for what they have done, but for what they could do. Perhaps temporarily appropriate in extreme cases, civil commitment has become a national scandal. Expanding it should be unthinkable. Second, the legitimacy of mandatory minimum sentences has been seriously questioned in the debates that led to the recent passage of the omnibus criminal justice reform bill. Yet the Governor's bill would significantly increase the numbers of not just mandatory sentences, but mandatory life sentences. We have been down this road before. It's a road that takes us to a bad place. Better to tailor sentences to what circumstance and justice demand.*

*Taking irrational measures that are unrelated to public safety but which satisfy our thirst for blood is bad policy.*

*It leads us to lose our minds – like seeing the 41 years that Mr. Chapman served behind bars for his terrible crimes as a light sentence. In fact, people who commit sexual offenses don't come from a dark planet. They come from our neighborhoods. They are our parents and children and neighbors. What's needed are fair trials, sentences that fit the crime and, upon completion of that sentence, access to work, a place to live, and treatment if appropriate. In combination with effective education and prevention measures, these practices will make us a safer and more just society than mandatory life sentences and lifetime civil commitment ever will.*

*Sincerely,*

*Paul Shannon*

Civil commitment that can last for years or a life time and lifetime mandatory minimum sentences are dangerous weapons. They are especially dangerous in the hands of those who act hastily, who act in opposition to scientific evidence, and who act out of political expediency.