

NARSOL'S AR affiliate: "Limit registry access to LE"

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By [Amanda Claire Curcio](#) . . . Arkansas has about 15,800 registered sex offenders – 526 offenders for every 100,000 residents – the second-highest total in the country based on population, recent national research shows.

The manager of the state's sex-offender registry says the numbers are misleading.

"It's not like we have 16,000 sex offenders roaming loose around Arkansas," said Paula Stitz. "It's more like 9,000." . . .

As of Aug. 1, there are 16,049 people registered in Arkansas' sex-offender database, Stitz said. Of those, more than 3,100 are incarcerated, about 3,400 are now outside the state, and 176 offenders have been deported, she said. . . .

State laws say that "sex offenders pose a high risk of reoffending after release from custody" and "the privacy interest of persons adjudicated guilty of sex offenses is less

important than the government's interest in public safety.”

Yet, research shows that sex offenders do not have increased recidivism rates.

For example, the U.S. Department of Justice tracked the repeat-offense rate of all male sex offenders released in 15 states for three years. Only 5 percent of those offenders were arrested for committing another sex crime, the 2003 study found. Other studies conducted by a handful of states yielded similar results: Between 3.5 percent and 4 percent of sex offenders were arrested for committing additional sex offenses after their release from prison.

That's why Carla Swanson says she's petitioned lawmakers for years to scale back restrictions on sex offenders. As a mother of one, she said the cause is personal.

Swanson heads Arkansas Time After Time, a legislative advocacy group formed in 2010 that aims to “make communities safer” by differentiating between “truly dangerous repeat violent sexual predators and those who at some time in their past committed a sex-related offense, served their sentence, completed or are currently undergoing treatment, and are working hard to reintegrate into society.”

Swanson wants to limit access to the registry, so it can be used only by law enforcement agencies. She also wants restrictions on where offenders can live, such as proximity to schools, to be lifted. No legislators have agreed to sponsor such a bill, she said.

“You have to be aware of your surroundings,” Swanson said. “There's not a law that's going to protect your child. You have to know what your kids are doing... The current laws make life harder for sex offenders than it needs to be.”

[Read the full piece here](#)