

Sex offender Halloween lock up? Ridiculous, wasted effort says NARSOL

written by admin | October 24, 2018



By [Antonia Noori Farzan](#) . . . Contrary to the widespread urban myth, there's [no evidence](#) that children are more likely to be targeted by sexual predators on Halloween than any on other night of the year.

But that hasn't stopped one Georgia mayor from announcing plans to round up all paroled sex offenders in town and hold them at city hall while kids are trick-or-treating.

Gary E. Jones, the mayor of Grovetown, Ga., announced Monday that sex offenders who are on probation – approximately 25 to 30 individuals – would be housed in the city council chambers for three hours on Halloween night.

[Initially](#), Jones' Facebook post had said that all sex offenders would be housed at city hall on Halloween, which could potentially be considered a form of unlawful detention and grounds for a lawsuit. He later updated the post to

clarify that he was only referring to individuals on probation.

Jones, whose office is nonpartisan, didn't respond to messages seeking comment Tuesday. But he did elaborate on his plans in exchanges with residents on Facebook. Describing the measure as purely precautionary, he [told residents](#) that there had been no previous incidents on Halloween. The state's probation office has the authority to require that paroled sex offenders report to them at a specific time and place, he [added](#), and the city was simply providing a facility where those offenders would check in.

"This is legal.... good grief!" [he wrote](#).

James Hill, a spokesman for Georgia's Department of Community Supervision, said in [an interview with WFXG](#) that communities do have the option of requiring paroled sex offenders to check into a specific location on Halloween night. "It would be no different than instructing an individual sex offender or otherwise to report to one of our offices," he [told the station](#) on Monday.

Sandy Rozek, the communications director for National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws, told The Washington Post that even if the mayor's plans don't violate the law, "it's still a ridiculous, wasted effort."

In Grovetown, a town of more than 12,000 located near the South Carolina border, the [response](#) from residents was mixed. Some thanked the mayor, while others argued that it was parents' responsibility to keep their children out of harm's way.

"Did you know you can be put on the sex offender list in Georgia for public urination?" [wrote one man](#). "Also, if you're going to do this, why stop at sex offenders? Why not include robbers, nonsexual assaulters, kidnappers, and murderers? This is one of those instances where an elected official is just

pandering for good press.”

[Another community member commented](#): “Everyone on this post questioning if this is legal sound[s] ignorant. Was what they did to make themselves be labeled as a sex offender legal? I think NOT . This is to protect innocent CHILDREN ! If you have a problem with it then go sit with them from 6-9pm.”

In 2009, a [peer-reviewed study](#) in the Association for Treatment of Sexual Abusers’ journal, “Sexual Abuse,” looked at more than 67,000 sex crimes involving children under the age of 12 that took place during an eight-year period. Researchers from the University of Oklahoma, Lynn University, Medical University of South Carolina and the Snohomish County Prosecutors Office found no evidence that those crimes spiked on or around Halloween. “These findings raise questions about the wisdom of diverting law enforcement resources to attend to a problem that does not appear to exist,” they concluded.

Programs like Grovetown’s make parents feel good, but they’re not a good use of resources, Rozek said. “Whoever is in there watching guys sit around because they’re on the registry would be much better served out in the community on traffic patrol and doing random checks to see if people have been drinking and driving,” she said.

The National Safety Council [reports](#) that “children are more than twice as likely to be hit by a car and killed on Halloween than on any other day of the year.” . . .

By singling out sex offenders on Halloween, Jones is inserting himself in the middle of another national debate. The Appeal, an online publication covering criminal justice, [reported earlier this month](#) that communities nationwide have enacted Halloween-specific restrictions that target people convicted of sex crimes – from banning them from decorating their homes with Halloween decorations to requiring them to post signs that say, “No candy or treats at this residence.” But some

have recently moved to [repeal](#) those ordinances rather than face litigation.

Meanwhile, [The Appeal reported](#), advocates have argued that these restrictions can make it harder for former offenders to reintegrate with society. And experts have expressed skepticism about whether they're actually an effective way of keeping children safe, since the [U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) has found that 93 percent of juvenile victims of sexual assault knew the perpetrator beforehand.

"It perpetuates the myth of 'stranger danger,'" Rozek told The Post. "It keeps parents thinking that it's going to be someone out there lying in wait for my child, when in reality virtually all sexual abuse of children is committed by family members, peers, and authority figures."

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