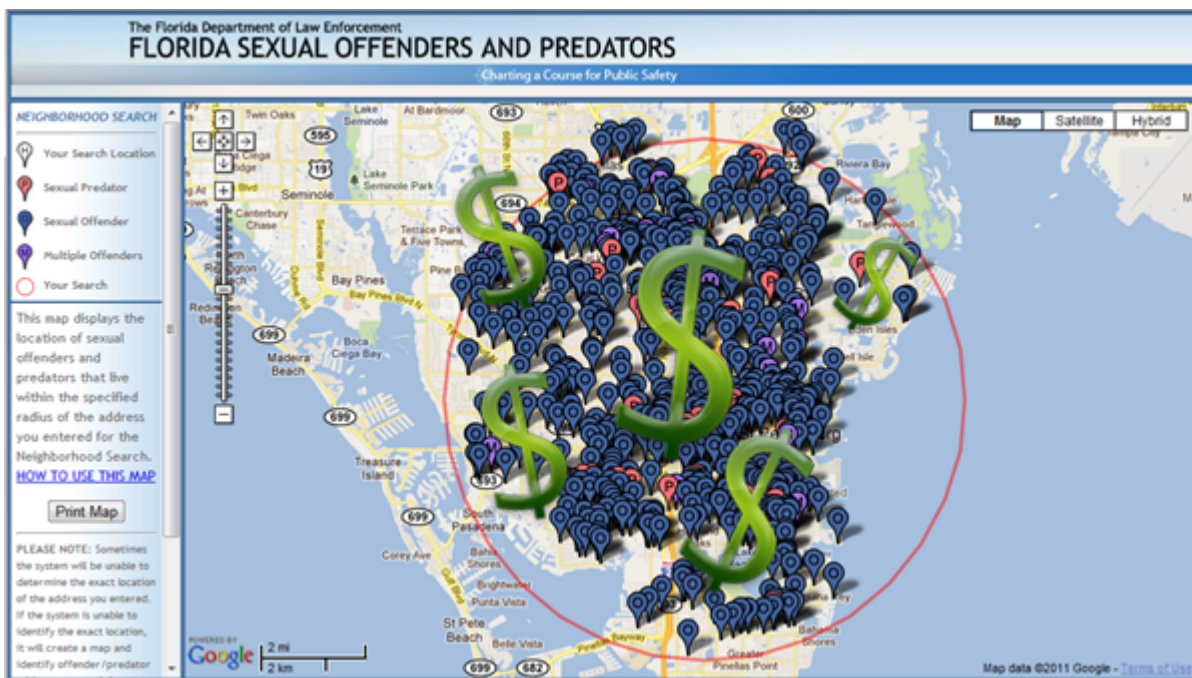


Florida's artificially inflated sexual offense registry: More federal funds for the state?

written by admin | March 3, 2019



By [Steve Yoder](#) . . . It was the kind of headline guaranteed to generate clicks even over the winter holidays and amid a federal government shutdown: “Number of Sex Offenders Living in Florida Is Growing,” [warned](#) the Associated Press. In December, the Florida legislative auditor’s office released a report noting that the number of people on the state’s sex offender registry had expanded 53 percent since 2005, to about 73,000.

But the report also contains this detail: 60 percent of those on the list live out of state, are in prison, or have been deported—up from the 43 percent in those categories in the auditors’ first report in 2006.

That’s because Florida’s registry increasingly scoops up

anyone who has ever lived there or visited. Under state law, anyone with a [sex crime](#) in their past who comes to Florida for three days or more—say, a long weekend at Disney World or a business conference—has to visit a sheriff’s office to get fingerprinted and photographed and turn over myriad other details. The state then publishes those and keeps these new registrants on its public list for a minimum of 25 years.

Not only does that [artificially inflate](#) Florida’s list, critics say—it makes it impossible for those who have served a sentence and moved away to start over, even when their new home jurisdictions don’t require them to be publicly listed. . . .

The ostensible purpose of Florida’s registration law is to protect its residents, says Ann Fitz, a [defense attorney](#) who’s suing the state in federal court over the policy on behalf of a client who lives in North Carolina but is listed only in Florida. “How are you protecting people from a so-called danger that doesn’t even have any jurisdictional tie to the state?” she asked. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

A bigger registry may help the state pull in federal funds. In fiscal year 2018, Florida, like [20](#) other states, was awarded money through a U.S. Department of Justice grant program that helps pay for upgrades to registries under the 2006 [Adam Walsh Act](#). Its grant for fiscal year 2018 was about \$399,000, and altogether the state has received about [\\$2.4 million](#) since 2008 for registry improvements.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement’s application for that money, which The Appeal obtained through a public-records request, uses the size of the registry to sell the state as a leader in punitiveness. In one section, the agency touts the more than 700 percent growth in the number of people on its registry since its inception in 1997 and its continuing expansion. “Florida currently has one of the largest registries in the country and enjoys national recognition as a

leader and model in the strength of sexual predator and offender laws," the agency notes.

[Read Steve's full piece here at The Appeal.](#)