

Why person-first language is right for those with sexual crime convictions

written by Sandy | December 30, 2021



By Sandy . . . Earlier this year the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board made the decision to adopt person-first language and change the nomenclature with which their clients are identified from “sex-offender” to “adults who commit sexual offenses.”

Person-first language has value. It does away with the [long-known dangerous practice](#) of labeling people, and especially labeling them with what we don’t want them to be. It acknowledges that, while the person committed an offense, he or she is still a person, and that people can and should and do change and move beyond their pasts.

Person-first language recognizes that people are not their crimes, but rather that people commit crimes. And above all, it gives those who have committed crimes, are repentant, and have changed or want to change a way of looking at and feeling

about themselves that is correlated with a [reduction in criminal behavior](#).

The [COSOMB, as long ago as 2017](#), recognized the value of person-first language (p.25) and expressed a commitment to it. What has happened to that commitment?

Person-first language is the first stepping stone in accomplishing a goal that is shared by those on both sides of what has become a very divisive controversy, the goal of improving safety for ourselves and, most especially, for our children.

The extreme irony is that those who have the most to benefit from this, those who plead that victims be put first, are driving the destructive controversy and opposition that have arisen around the issue.

And for now, they have won. Just as they seem to want to be known forever as victims, they have assured that those who made them victims are known forever as victimizers. It has become a game of tit for tat.

Due largely to comments and pressure from these "victims' advocates," Governor Jared Polis has pressured the CSOMB to reverse its stance on the change in language. The issue has been tabled; it may come up again, but it is highly unlikely to do so anytime soon.

And those who are claiming victory are not seeing what they stand to lose.

Will not those who have been victims and especially those who might be in the future benefit if something positive can be done to help lower this risk?

The CSOMB's practice of calling those they serve "sex offenders" when the vast majority, [according to their own report](#), are no longer offending could well serve to keep

those with prior sexual convictions **from** the rehabilitation and successful reentry they purport to offer.

It is difficult to conceive of anything more antithetical to rehabilitation and reentry than a system which labels those it treats with a term that evokes fear, danger, and negativity; that discourages individualism but rather covers everyone, umbrella fashion, as if they were all the same; and that conveys present and future action, as though they are now and always will be sex offenders.

Virtually everybody convicted of a sexual crime and given a prison sentence will be returning to society at a future date. How do we want them returned? Do we want them thinking themselves worthless and incapable of change? Do we want them believing that they are indeed "sex offenders" and criminals and might as well behave as such?

Or would we prefer that they see themselves as those who committed crimes, served their punishment, are sorrowful for the harm they caused, but are capable and worthy of taking their places in a law-abiding society?

The answer to this should be obvious.