

Serious questions asked about Tennessee's sex offender registry

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By [Levi Ismail](#) . . . Attorneys have called for a change to the Tennessee sex offender registry they said created an unconstitutional punishment as legislators added more restrictions each year.

Thomas has lived in Nashville almost all his life, but he's rarely seen beyond work and the occasional grocery store run. . . .

NewsChannel 5 Investigates doesn't often hear from people like Thomas, because once you find out he's been on the sex offender registry almost as long as it's been around, we understand he's not the easiest person to want to relate to.

But imagine this, being convicted of a crime, given a punishment for that crime, and having that punishment change year after year. . . .

At the time Thomas was told to report once a year, pay an annual fee, and tell the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation where he lived, what he drove, and where he worked.

He couldn't live near a park, a school, or anywhere children could reasonably be, even though his crime had nothing to do with children.

The registry at the time was written so Thomas could appeal to take his name off the list 10 years after he had completed his full sentence, which would have been 2014. So why is Thomas still on the list in 2022? Because Tennessee lawmakers made sure he would be there for life. . . .

There were at least 16 changes between the 1994 Sex Offender Registry Act and what took place in 2003. Each change often meant another restriction for those on the registry to the point where lawmakers realized there were so many changes, that it was better to write a new registry.

There were at least 20 more restrictions added to this new registry up until 2015. . . .

"More and more courts are saying, 'wait a minute. We've gone beyond just mere registration,'" [defense attorney] Raybin said.

Last year, a U.S. District Court judge [ordered two Tennessee men to be removed from the registry](#) because the court said all these changes created an unconstitutional punishment.

Another man sued the state of Tennessee a month later after being forced into Tennessee's registry for a 1993 conviction in Illinois. Records showed he already completed his full sentence before moving to Tennessee but had to register as a sex offender in Tennessee anyway.

You may not even be on the registry any longer in that other state, but Raybin says the rules in Tennessee say you must

still register and that may land you on our registry for life.

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[Read the full piece here at NewsChannel 5 in Nashville.](#)