

Of “sex offender” residence restrictions and other foolish things

written by Sandy | September 13, 2022



By Sandy . . . How many times have we seen it happen. There have been too many to count, going back years, among them [Connecticut](#), [Rhode Island](#), [Wisconsin](#), and more recently [Joliet, Illinois](#).

Now there is [Lakeside, California](#): “Neighbors angry to find five sex offenders secretly placed in their Lakeside neighborhood.”

The plot is virtually always the same. People living in a community become aware that an individual or a group of individuals listed on their state’s sexual offender registry are living in their neighborhood.

They are furious; they are indignant; the purity and sanctity of their world has been sullied; their children are in imminent danger of harm; they demand answers; they want action. In some cases, they protest with signs and gatherings

and sometimes threats of violence. Often the press piles on, as above in the Lakeside story, with hyperbole, fear tactics, and pejorative language.

The homes where the registrants are living will have been approved by the state DOC or department of paroles and pardons. In some cases, such as in Joliet and Lakewood, the homes are specifically designed for registrants, halfway houses of a sort, attempts by the state to help reduce homelessness and to give registrants a place to live to become reacclimated to the "outside" world, to have the support of those helping them and of each other, to focus on their commitments not to reoffend.

[Of this Lakewood situation](#), Dana Simas, the California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation press secretary, said, "Our first priority is public safety. Providing reentry services is an imperative piece to achieving reduced recidivism and ensuring that those being released from prison have resources available in their communities."

This logic, this construction of programs that is based on empirical evidence, this concern above all for public safety, fall on deaf ears. The neighbors always demand that something be done. The level of vitriol and hatred, the words and actions amounting to vigilantism, portray NIMBYism at its best – or worst.

And there is almost always someone there willing and full of promises to "set things right" and "protect the children."

[In Joliet it is Mayor Bob O'Dekirk](#) who, amid vows and promises to get rid of the registrants, persuaded the town council to buy property with a house within 500 feet of the offending "sex offender" property. The intent is to raze the house and create a pocket park in order to make the residence an illegal dwelling for registrants according to state law. This is still an on-going situation, one NARSOL is following closely.

In Lakeside, it is Senator Brian Jones coming to the rescue of the community with promises “. . . to change the laws that allow this to happen in the first place.”

Yesterday Illinois; today California. Where will it be tomorrow? Towns in many states are rushing to create new restrictions limiting where persons required to register may live, work, or even walk without breaking the law. They pop up like fungi, putting forth declarations of need filled with – you guessed it – hyperbole, fear tactics, and out-and-out lies.

A few states, realizing their lack of value and the very negative consequences that follow, forbid residence restrictions for registrants after a sentence is completed. In some states suits have been filed, as the ACLU/NARSOL suit in Rhode Island (see above). In some states and jurisdictions courts have found these restrictions unconstitutional under some circumstances.

These and other laws and restrictions visited upon persons with sexual crime convictions and no other category of criminal behavior are not associated with any enhanced public safety benefits, and yet they continue.

And as long as they do, so will the suits and the pushback. So will NARSOL.