

Press Release: NARSOL calls for end to sex offender registries

written by Sandy | October 27, 2022



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Cites overwhelming evidence of ineffectiveness after a quarter century

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Why do we have sex offender registries?

Patty Wetterling, the mother of Jacob Wetterling, was largely responsible for [the creation of such a registry](#) in 1994 after Jacob was abducted in 1989. As early as 2007 she was questioning the wisdom of the registry.

In [a published essay she penned in 2007](#), she wrote, “. . . I’m worried that we’re focusing so much energy on naming and shaming convicted sex offenders that we’re not doing as much as we should to protect our children from other real threats. Many states make former offenders register for life, restrict where they can live, and make their details known to the public. And yet evidence suggests that these laws may do more harm than good.”

This is what we need to be about, protecting our children, and for that we need facts and truth and laws based on them, not on emotion, especially not emotion in the face of tragedy.

Responding to [a Human Rights Watch report](#), Patty said, “The researchers examined whether we are building safer communities with these laws, and what issues policy-makers should consider. HRW found that many laws may not prevent sexual attacks on children, but do lead to harassment, ostracism and even violence against former offenders. That makes it nearly impossible to rehabilitate those people and reintegrate them safely into their communities . . .”

Years later, in 2016, [she said this](#): “What we really want is no more victims. Don’t do it again. So, how can we get there? Locking them up forever, labeling them, and not allowing them community support doesn’t work. I’ve turned 180 (degrees) from where I was.”

180 degrees.

The abduction and murder of Polly Klaas in 1993 was coincidentally and horrifically timed to add fuel to the creation of the sex offender registry. Kidnapped from a slumber party in her own home with her sleeping mother in the house, Polly was molested, strangled, and not found for two months.

Her parents, especially her father Marc, became a large part of the public face of the drive to create a registry. [His fervor has not wavered](#).

Polly’s two sisters Jess and Annie Nichol, however, have made their own 180 degree turn from their father’s views and closed ranks with those of Patty Wetterling, with [their criticism going further](#), saying, “We don’t want our pain to be used to punish anyone else.” In addition to overly-punitive laws, they address the issues of mass incarceration and racial inequality.

According to [their October 2022 interview with the Guardian](#), “They say they want a different criminal justice system, one that focuses on preventing violence; accountability, treatment and rehabilitation for people who cause harm; and care and services for survivors.”

They feel we are on the brink of enacting harsher laws and moving further and further away from what Patty Wetterling learned through research, that the laws that created the sex offender registry and all that it has spawned embody the opposite of what is needed for improved public safety.

Why then do we have a sex offender registry?

The premise on which the entire thing is built, frightening and high sexual offense recidivism, [is a lie](#).

The [most comprehensive post-incarceration sexual offense recidivism study](#) ever done shows a 5.3 percent rearrest rate for a sexual offense with a 3.5 reconviction rate.

The [collateral consequences](#) for registrants, their partners, and their children are devastating. Where they are present, restrictions on where persons on the registry may live, work, and be and other blanket restrictions and exclusions affecting all registrants [virtually assure rehabilitative failure](#) to varying degrees, some drastically due to [homelessness](#).

The registry, “sold” as a tool to help keep children safe, [registers children as young as nine](#), often for age-appropriate curiosity, and causes them irreparable harm.

Jacob’s and Polly’s abductions are rare exceptions; [the vast, vast majority of sexual abuse of minors](#) occurs within the “circle of trust” of family, peers, and authority figures, persons who won’t be found on a sex registry.

Every scholarly work done on the subject of sex offender registries finds them ineffective at lowering recidivism, protecting children, or providing a safer society and finds that often an outcome opposite to what is desired is produced.

Members of two of the families who were instrumental in creating it, who suffered unimaginable tragedies, now denounce the registry for a variety of reasons.

So . . . WHY do we have sex offender registries?