

Dear Manchester Aldermen,

I am writing to you regarding the proposed sex offender residency restriction ordinances. Enclosed you will find a packet of information released to our State Legislators earlier this year and a one page fact sheet that I plan to distribute at the town meeting. As you may already be aware, the state of NH chose not to enact a state law specifying where sex offenders can and cannot live. I was there when this bill (HB340) was debated before the House Committee for Criminal Justice and Public Safety. Even though it made front page news in the Nashua Telegraph and was mentioned in Manchester newspapers, there were no private citizens in attendance to support this bill. The majority of those who spoke did so in opposition to such a restriction, citing the problems other communities and states have faced because of such legislation.

I testified against this legislation in person because of the unintended consequences that could result. A registered sex offender is not a black and white absolute. Not all have molested young children. Some were teenagers who were experimenting consensually outside the bounds of the law. Others are the result of a drunken night of college sex that turned into a 'he said, she said' and resulted in conviction. Not all are acts of violent, predatory forced rape. Because there is no distinction or classification made, the people of Manchester are not able to determine who is a true risk. To pass residency restrictions and have them apply equally to the Romeo and Juliet's the same as they apply to rape of a 3 year old is counterproductive. Many registered offenders have families and children of their own, and these restrictions would be a further source of humiliation to the spouse and children of a registered offender. Unfortunately, these laws and ordinances do not just apply to the registered sex offender; they affect the family members of registered sex offenders as well. Further, since research and experts show that most sexual assaults take place in the home of the victim, residency restrictions would not be effective in curbing one of the most pervasive forms of sexual abuse: incest.

It is for these reasons that I ask the fine people of Manchester, and our elected officials, to take the high road. Search for real solutions, not 'sound good, feel good' ordinances that are ineffective and costly to enforce. As the largest city in the state, we can do more and we can do better. It has long been known that the best defense against child victimization is the parent. Education and awareness are the keys to preventing abuse and stopping it early. I believe we, the people of Manchester, can do a better job at stopping abuse than any law or ordinance could ever hope to do. I would ask that you refer these concerns to the school board and ask them to review the policies for education and awareness about sexual abuse. Make sure they are up-to-date and include the latest research and prevention methods. We owe it to our children to equip them with the tools to spot abuse and abuse patterns to prevent it from happening to them.

Sincerely,

Laurie Peterson