

Written Testimony Opposing Raised Bill No. 6643
An Act Concerning Residency Restrictions for Certain Registered Sexual Offenders

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Committee on Judiciary. My name is Sandra Staub. As the legal director of the ACLU of Connecticut, I write to oppose Raised Bill No. 6643, An Act Concerning Residency Restrictions for Certain Registered Sexual Offenders.

The ACLU-CT cares deeply about the safety of children. However, this bill does nothing but create a false sense of security, infringe on the rights of offenders and increase the risk of re-offending.

Sex offenders have one of the lowest recidivism rates of all offenders. Studies show that there is no evidence that proximity to schools affects recidivism. Further, the vast majority of crimes against children are caused by acquaintances, not strangers.

In highly populated urban areas, it is next to impossible to find housing that is not within 2,000 feet of a school. This bill effectively bans offenders from living in cities, forcing them to seek housing in the suburbs or country, far removed from work, therapy and community resources that help prevent recidivism. This bill will cause other housing difficulties. While it would not force an offender to leave his current home if it is near a school, it does mean that an offender whose lease expires may be unable to find new housing, causing widespread homelessness. Many offenders may lack transportation and rely on city bus systems to get to and from their jobs. Even if they could find and afford housing in the suburbs, being removed from public transportation systems could cause them to lose their jobs, forcing them into homelessness and instability. Indigence simultaneously increases the chances of recidivism and decreases the ability of the government to track and monitor the offender. Studies have shown that unstable living conditions lead to higher rates of recidivism and absconding.

The housing difficulties caused by this bill create perverse disincentives for an offender to comply with the registration requirements if he or she moves. Offenders wishing to live in a city must choose between updating their addresses and admitting to violating the law, or failing to register or lying about their address, leaving the government no way to track and monitor them, and leaving neighbors without warning that they are living near a sex offender.

In order to reduce and prevent sexual abuse, the ACLU of Connecticut urges you to oppose Raised Bill No. 6643. Children are safer when potential offenders are allowed to live in stable environments where they can access resources and be appropriately monitored. This bill makes it difficult if not impossible for offenders to find housing and employment, and increases the odds that some offenders will re-offend by forcing them into unstable situations.