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Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

February 2007

Prevention Policy Update Sex offender management laws

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the first issue of the Stop It Now! Policy Update, our regular contribution to the conversation about creating safer communities.

Our goal is to be a resource for advocates for preventing child sexual abuse, and to highlight the role of prevention in the ever-changing policy landscape. We'll share the latest information and experiences from across the continuum of policy work, from grassroots advocacy to state and federal legislation.

Let us know how we're doing. I look forward to hearing your feedback and ideas for future issues.

Sincerely,
Deborah Donovan Rice
Director of Public Policy

State legislators briefed on sex offender management

Signs of a more reasoned approach?

Are state-level legislators responding more positively to the idea that we can prevent child sexual abuse *before* a child is harmed? We think so.

On January 27-28, [Stop It Now!](#) joined other experts and state legislators in Little Rock, AR to explore current and promising sex offender management policies. The two-day *National Legislative Briefing on Sex Offender Management Policy in the States* was convened by the [Council of State Governments](#) (CSG) to identify the critical implications of current policies for states.

Presentations countered many misconceptions that dominate the popular media and public opinion. Legislators heard reports on the effectiveness of evidence-based policy interventions that stand in contrast to the ineffectiveness of the largely reactive policies now spreading nationwide.

In her plenary session, [Stop It Now!](#) President, Maxine Stein, drew out the role of prevention in creating greater community safety. Our hopeful



message and proactive approach - emphasizing **prevention as an alternative to waiting until after abuse has occurred** - was well received. Legislators showed strong interest in bringing prevention programming to their states.

Legislators also expressed **enthusiasm for future briefings**. These comprehensive, well-organized meetings are an excellent forum for bringing together the full range of voices needed in policy discussions about this issue, including those representing the needs of victims, sex offender management boards and treatment professionals, and those delivering prevention programming. Similar policy dialogues will do much to expand public discourse about preventing child sexual abuse.

The Briefing was **part of a larger initiative** that is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice/Bureau of Justice Assistance, and includes [The Center for Sex Offender Management](#), [Association of Paroling Authorities International](#), and the [American Probation and Parole Association](#).

We will let you know when CSG releases a full report. Contact us if you are interested in learning more about the meeting or our participation in it.

[Read more about the CSG initiative ...](#)

Do current sex offender laws promote community safety?

... or the illusion of safety?

Staying informed about policies related to child sexual abuse prevention has never been more important – especially as more stringent laws for managing sex offenders sweep across the country.



For an overview of these issues, read the article, "[States Aim to Stop Sex Offenders, Will New Laws Keep Children Safe?](#)"

Unfortunately, many well-intended laws designed to prevent sexual violence **do not show any evidence of effectiveness** - and may have **unintended negative consequences**.

Residency restrictions and community notification laws may even be undermining community safety. For example, a survey of recently released sex offenders in Florida indicated that housing restrictions increased isolation, created financial and emotional stress, and led to decreased stability ([Levenson & Cotter 2005](#)). Making it more difficult for individuals to live in the community increases the risk that they may re-offend.

We were recently contacted by Kate Fitch of the [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children](#)/NSPCC (UK) about the impact of community notification and sex offender registry laws enacted in the US. Called [Megan's Law: Does it protect children?](#), the report reviews US policies and includes five state case studies, key findings and analysis.

Finch found no evidence that widely releasing sex offender information to the public prevents sexual crimes. The report to UK policymakers emphasized the need for a broader debate about preventing sexual abuse including public education and increased treatment resources.

[Read the full report...](#)

Community re-entry recast as primary prevention

Safer communities are a shared responsibility

"Community members have a vested interest in the success of the returning ex-offender."

- Detective Robert A. Shilling, Jr., lead detective, Sex and Kidnapping Offender, Seattle Police Department



Stop It Now! believes that a proactive process for managing the re-entry process of individuals who have been convicted of sex crimes can be valuable for building community-wide prevention strategies. At its best, community re-entry can be a cooperative process in which citizens, public officials and professionals all have important roles to play in preventing future sexual assaults.

If you are interested in how a rethinking of sex offender re-entry policies can protect children before they are harmed - and promote community safety - **read our article** "[Community Re-entry Recast as Primary Prevention](#)" published in *Sex Offender Law Report* (Aug/Sept 2006). In it, we identify specific opportunities to inform public dialogue about child sexual abuse prevention as part of the re-entry process.

[Read our article...](#)

Support Stop It Now!



If you appreciate staying informed about prevention policy - and believe in our approach to creating safer communities, please support our work.

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Thank you!

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