



Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
**HB 5449, AAC Residency Restrictions for Registered Sexual Offenders**  
**HB 5525, AAC Child Pornography**

Jillian Gilchrest, Director of Public Policy and Communications  
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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am the Director of Public Policy & Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally-competent sexual assault victim services.

During our last fiscal year, certified sexual assault victim advocates provided hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information and referrals to over 7,000 victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state.

**HB 5449, AAC Residency Restrictions for Registered Sexual Offenders**

As advocates, we are concerned anytime a convicted sex offender is released into the community. Ensuring that our children are safe is of the utmost priority to us all, and we applaud the committee for promoting community safety and addressing child sexual abuse. While well intended, CONNSACS must oppose HB 5449, which would prohibit certain sexual offenders from residing within one-thousand feet of an elementary school, secondary school, or day care facility, based on our experience and the research about unintended consequences of similar legislation that has passed in other states, such as California.

Connecticut actually has an innovative treatment model for post-conviction sexual offenders. Every offender undergoes a comprehensive risk assessment before being released into the community, and supervising officers work with victim advocates and treatment providers to monitor an offender's progress. Offenders who are on probation and parole must abide by a range of conditions based on their risk assessments. Because many offenders must have their housing approved as a condition of release, particularly dangerous offenders who pose a risk to

children are already prohibited from living near schools, parks, day care centers, and other places where children congregate.

Although well intended, one-size-fits-all residency restrictions have actually been known to reduce public safety by prompting some sex offenders to stop registering, driving them underground, where probation and parole cannot monitor them. Almost all convicted sexual offenders will be released back into the community at some point, and when they are, they have to live somewhere. If one-thousand foot residency restrictions were imposed in urban areas such as Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven, sexual offenders would have virtually nowhere to live within the city limits.

For better or worse, convicted sex offenders gravitate toward cities due to the availability of community services, public transportation, affordable housing, and employment. If Connecticut imposes one-thousand foot residency restrictions, sexual offenders who live in urban areas will be confined to particular neighborhoods and apartment buildings, essentially creating sex offender microcosms that could pose a risk to public safety. In addition to creating concentrated enclaves of sexual offenders, residency restrictions can also increase the incidence of homelessness in offender populations.

We know from other's experience that stable housing is an important factor in reducing recidivism. In California, where a two-thousand foot residency restriction law went into effect in 2006, there has been an astounding 2,285% increase in the number of sex offenders who register as transient. In Connecticut, it is not possible for offenders to register as transient or homeless; they must list a residential address in order to stay in compliance with the terms of their probation or parole. If it becomes too difficult for offenders to find housing and stay in compliance with the terms of their release, they will simply stop checking with their probation and parole officers. Unsupervised offenders pose a heightened risk to the community.

Finally, residency restrictions give a false impression that children are most likely to be abused by predatory strangers. From year to year, national statistics from the Department of Justice and local statistics from CONNSACS have shown that nearly 95% of child sexual abuse victims know their offender before the assault. Cases of child sexual abuse that involve an unknown assailant garner extensive media attention and can lead members of the public and lawmakers to conclude that these cases illustrate typical offender behavior. Taking extreme measures to keep offenders away from schools or day care centers may give the public a false sense of security.

For all of these reasons, CONNSACS opposes the passage of HB 5449. We would be happy to provide interested members of the Committee with additional research and information about residency restrictions.

### **HB 5525, AAC Child Pornography**

CONNSACS would also like to express support for HB 5525, which makes a technical change to update Connecticut's current law regarding the possession of child pornography to clearly define an image in an electronic or digital format. Every time an image is shared or viewed it is a victimization and should be a crime.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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Langan and Levin. *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice: Washington, DC, 2002.

"Jessica's Law needs a major overhaul." Editorial. [The Sacramento Bee](#). 16 November 2010.