

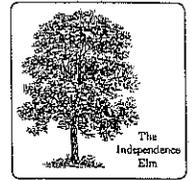


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Senior and Disabled Center



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Testimony of
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Aging Committee Public Hearing
February 10, 2015

REGARDING
Proposed SB 204
AN ACT CONCERNING BEST PRACTICES FOR PROTECTING SENIOR CITIZENS FROM
INTERACTION WITH SEXUAL OFFENDERS

Senator Flexer, Representative Serra and esteemed Members of the Aging Committee. I am Dianne Stone, the Director of the Newington Senior and Disabled Center, the first Center in the State of Connecticut to achieve National Accreditation. I was also privileged to be appointed to the Senior Safety Task Force co-chaired by Senator Osten. As a member of this task force I can attest to the meaningful and consultative process that went in to drafting recommendations. I appreciate that this bill has been brought forward.

The language proposed, "To employ best practices for protecting senior citizens in their homes, at senior centers and at long-term care facilities from unwanted interaction with sexual offenders" was essentially the first charge of the task force formed by Special Act No. 14-20. I believe that the task force, through a meaningful and consultative process, drafted more specific recommendations based on this charge and I would encourage the Aging Committee to consider including those recommendations in the proposed bill.

Over the course of the task force, we learned that of all of the sexual assaults reported in Connecticut between 2009-2013, only 1.3% were victims over the age of 60. A national study of elder sexual abuse found that the vast majority of suspected offenders were caregivers. Of course, the data does represent only reported cases and sexual assault is underreported across age groups.

We learned that law enforcement and probation and parole use screening processes to analyze risks posed by sex offenders but that they may not be standardized across the state and that, while they consider notifications to schools and libraries, they probably don't look at potential risk in senior centers. Those were the first two recommendations.

1. Replicate law enforcement models that do a case-by-case analysis of an offender's criminal history when they move into a town, and provide notification to appropriate officials as necessary. During the analysis by local law enforcement, a scientifically validated risk assessment tool should be used to provide a standardized approach to evaluating risk to the community.

2. Provide education to local law enforcement and probation and parole officers about the role of community and senior centers so law enforcement recognizes the need to notify them when a sex offender has moved into the area. Often schools are notified and a safety plan put in place. We recommend working with senior and community centers, libraries and other public offices in the same way as schools.

In discussing the value of the registry in assessing risk, it is clear that a lay person would not likely be able to differentiate a violent offender from a statutory offender. Providing this differentiation would make the registry a more valuable tool for identifying risk, no matter how small that risk might be. This was the 3rd recommendation of the task force.

3. Explore a modification to the sex offender registry to include a tiered system that may help law enforcement and community members better understand the nature of the offenses and risk (if any) to the public. The current registry includes very little information about the type of crime the person has committed that may lead to misinformation and fear in the public.

While the risk of unwanted interaction with sexual offenders may be low, we did discuss that there are risks to the safety and security of older adults in senior centers, community centers and congregate housing and that those facilities may not have plans or procedures to provide protection or management of situations. This was addressed in the 4th recommendation of the task force.

4. Encourage senior centers, community centers and congregate housing sites, in collaboration with local law enforcement, Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, and other victim-oriented groups to implement a safety plan that includes training and education to appropriate staff to identify and manage risk for all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation

Elder abuse is a problem. Victimization through abuse, neglect and exploitation happens across the country, in every state, in every town. I am grateful that Connecticut has engaged an Elder Justice Coalition to address the issue of elder abuse in a collaborative, multidisciplinary and multijurisdictional way. I am also grateful that the legislature and, specifically, this Committee, continues to look for ways to help us protect older adults who are at risk. Adoption of these recommendations does that.