



September 26, 2017

Dear Governor Raimondo:

We write to respectfully and strongly ask you to veto bill S 897, which would cap the number of registered sex offenders (RSOs) at 10% for residential facilities receiving state funding that serve as homeless shelters.

While this bill purports to enhance public safety by de-concentrating RSOs, its effect is the opposite. It does nothing to provide alternative housing or community placement for the forty (40) to fifty (50) individuals who will be displaced by its passage, thereby forcing these individuals literally onto the street. This creates a potential threat to the safety of both the community at large and the RSOs who will be forced out of shelter.

The reasons this legislation will in fact work against the public interest are as follows:

*The legislation places those who have to register – and the broader community – at risk.*

Forcing individuals out of the shelters where they are engaged in case management and mental health treatment – and where their presence is known and documented – works against attempts by RSOs and support providers to re-integrate these individuals into the community by identifying housing, employment, and community-based care.

Furthermore, it places RSOs at an increased risk of sickness and dying as a result of exposure to the elements (particularly given that this bill is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2018 – in midwinter) and being the victims of vigilante justice.

All research on community reintegration and recidivism risk find that the best way to reduce re-offenses and support pro-social behavior is through helping formerly incarcerated individuals become stable in and connected with their community. This law will do exactly the opposite, thereby working against its stated goal of public safety. It will also make SROs harder, not easier, for law enforcement to track.

*This legislation does nothing to address the causes of homelessness among RSOs and places RSOs in physical danger*

The signers of this letter agree that the number of RSOs experiencing homelessness is a significant problem that is very worthy of study and intervention. Warehousing individuals in shelters is neither humane nor cost-effective. However, forcing individuals out of shelter will not alleviate their homelessness – the problem is that there are not enough housing opportunities available to those experiencing homelessness, particularly those who must register as sex

*“Helping Our Homeless”*

offenders. In fact, as you are aware, other legislation enacted by the General Assembly in past years already significantly limits where sex offenders can reside.

While the bill's House sponsor has publicly stated that he wishes to use the bill as a way to catalyze this conversation, a discussion about identifying housing options for RSOs did not occur in the three months this bill was pending on the floor, and realistically will not occur in any substantial form prior to the bill's implementation. What will happen instead is that the displaced RSOs will – as a best case – subsist in the woods, under bridges, and in alleyways with minimal connection to services. Many will become re-incarcerated for administrative registry violations at great expense to the taxpayer. Others may freeze to death or be murdered.

We urge a veto of this bill so that more meaningful alternatives can be considered during future legislative sessions. First among these is a creation of a study commission. As discussed above, there has not been adequate time to discuss and identify resources for alternative housing and community placement options for the RSOs who will be displaced by the passage of this bill. Creating a study commission and delaying the consideration of such legislation until its recommendations have been generated and considered gives time for thoughtful reflection, resource identification, and policy implementation.

Alternatively, amendments should be made to the bill to minimize its impact. Specifically, Level 1 and 2 RSOs should be excluded. The system of leveling RSOs attempts to identify those most at risk for recidivism. Those considered most likely to reoffend are categorized as Level 3s. While these writers do not think that this legislation is valid for any subpopulation of RSOs, limiting the bill's reach to only Level 3s at least minimizes the unintended consequence of making a large number of RSOs immediately street homeless.

Similarly, the timing of the effective date should be examined in order to better protect those individuals who will be directly impacted by the bill's implementation.

In conclusion, we respectfully ask that as Governor, you veto this legislation in light of the full consequences of signing it into law. While its intent may be public safety, its effect will be the direct opposite. We understand and appreciate the State's attention to the issue of homelessness among RSOs, but this bill is not the means to solve the problem we all agree exists. To the contrary: it is counter-productive and increases, rather than reduces, risks to both the community and ex-offenders subject to its provisions.

We are available to answer any questions or discuss further any of the information presented herein.

Sincerely,

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