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**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO
17-H 5159, H-5207, H-5722, and H-5724.
BILLS RELATING TO SEX OFFENDERS
March 22, 2017**

H-5159 would bar residential facilities receiving state assistance from providing more than 10% of its units to sex offenders. **H-5207** would require homeless shelters, upon criminal penalty, to report to local police the presence of any sex offender in their shelter. **H-5722** would authorize innkeepers to kick out any Level III sex offender living in the facility for more than 30 days. **H-5724** requires school departments to notify parents of students whose residence is within 1,000 feet of a Level III's sex offender's residence. We believe all of these bills are problematic.

Sex offenders deserve to be punished for their crimes, but these bills – like many of the other laws that target sex offenders – are counter-productive and will have no positive effect on public safety. Instead, they serve to further punish offenders after they have been released from prison, and they can have the effect, however unintended, of unnecessarily encouraging offenders' re-incarceration.

Like the residency restrictions that the General Assembly has enacted barring sex offenders from living within a certain distance of schools, bills like these are based on the deeply flawed assumption that most sexual abuse is committed by strangers. Yet the statistics are clear: 90% or so of child sexual assaults are committed by family members, friends or acquaintances of the victim, not by strangers who find their victims at schools or bus stops or hotels. Thus, bills like these completely miss the mark, for the problem has nothing to do with not knowing where a sex offender is located.

Unfortunately, bills like these also have the further negative impact of making it very difficult for sex offenders to reintegrate themselves into the community, and the resulting instability can have the effect of increasing, rather than decreasing, the likelihood of recidivism. It increases their risks of homelessness and thereby limits police ability to monitor their location.

There is a good deal of irony in bills to bar sex offenders from staying in shelters or hotels. Some of those offenders are there because the residency laws this General Assembly has passed have forced them to go there. The increase in sex offenders at Harrington Hall, for example, is largely attributable to laws limiting where they can live. If congregating many sex offenders in one place is the true concern of the legislature, the Committee should consider repealing the current residency bans rather than passing bills like these.

We therefore urge the Committee to carefully consider the counterproductive consequences associated with these bills and to reject them.