

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2006 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 14 (Senator Stone)
Judicial Proceedings

Sex Offender Task Force

This bill creates the Sex Offender Task Force to examine State, federal, and other state provisions concerning sex offenders. The task force must prepare a report of findings and legislative recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 31, 2007. The Department of Legislative Services will provide staff for the task force.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for the Department of Legislative Services are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Generally, a person convicted of a sex crime or other specified crime in Maryland, including kidnapping and false imprisonment, is required to register with the State sex offender registry upon release from prison or release from court if the person did not receive a prison sentence. Offenders who are required to register in other states and who come to Maryland are required to register upon entering Maryland. Offenders from other states who may not be required to register in the home state are required to register in Maryland if the crime would have required registration in Maryland if

committed in Maryland. Juveniles who are adjudicated as adults and convicted for crimes that require registration are included in the registry. Juveniles who are adjudicated delinquent for these crimes through the juvenile court system are not included in the registry.

Background: Across the country, cases in which registered sex offenders have failed to update their addresses and have gone on to commit heinous sexual crimes have prompted lawmakers in several states to examine the ways of accounting for these offenders. In 2005, there were two notorious cases of child abduction, molestation, and murder by previously convicted child sex offenders – one in Idaho and the other in Florida. The Florida case, involving a nine-year-old girl named Jessica Lunsford, has led that state to enact new legislation that:

- mandates a 25-year minimum mandatory term of imprisonment followed by lifetime supervision with electronic monitoring for persons convicted of lewd and lascivious molestation of a child under the age of 12 (there had been no lifetime supervision mandate);
- expands from 20 to 30 years the period of time before someone can petition to have the sexual predator designation removed;
- creates a new aggravating circumstance to qualify a sexual predator who commits a murder for a death sentence;
- retroactively requires the court to electronically monitor registered sex offenders and sexual predators whose victims were 15 years of age or younger and who violate their probation or community control and the court imposes a subsequent term of probation and community control; and
- prospectively mandates the court to order electronic monitoring for persons placed on probation or community control who are convicted or previously convicted of various unlawful sex acts against a child 15 years of age or younger or are registered sexual predators.

The U. S. Congress will consider the Children’s Safety Act of 2005 (HR 3132) during 2006. This federal legislation would, in part:

- require the U.S. Attorney General to (1) maintain a national sex offender registry at the Federal Bureau of Investigation; (2) establish a sex offender management assistance program; and (3) authorize sex offender apprehension grants;
- amend (1) the DNA Identification Act of 1994 to expand the scope of DNA samples to be included in the Combined DNA Index System; and (2) the DNA Analysis Backlog Elimination Act of 2000 to authorize the Attorney General to

collect DNA samples from individuals who are arrested or detained under U. S. authority;

- increase penalties for violent crimes against persons under age 18, including death or life imprisonment, if the crime results in the death of a person under that age, and increase penalties for sexual offenses against children;
- require background checks and checks of national crime information databases and state child abuse registries before approval of foster or adoptive placements; and
- establish (1) procedures for the civil commitment of sexually dangerous persons; and (2) mandatory minimum penalties for child sex trafficking.

Maryland first enacted sexual offender registration legislation under the federal Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Program in 1995. State sex offender registration laws have been amended and updated several times to remain in compliance with federal regulations and guidelines.

According to the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, 4,335 offenders are currently included in the Maryland sex offender registry. About 500 to 600 new offenders are added on an annual basis. The majority of offenders in the registry are required to continue registering for life.

Over the summer of 2005, the Governor ordered a police check across the State on more than 400 sex offenders who reportedly had moved to Maryland but had not registered. The Associated Press reported that, under this Sex Offenders Compliance and Enforcement initiative, of the 403 sought, 69 sex offenders were found and ordered to register immediately; 130 were determined to be living outside Maryland; 104 were incarcerated in federal or state prisons; 5 were dead; 7 remained under investigation; and for another 88, there was no information to show they had moved to Maryland.

The Governor has proposed strengthening penalties and increasing oversight of offenders, including the use of global positioning system (GPS) anklets. At the same time, Maryland's Attorney General has unveiled a plan to require lifetime supervision for the most violent sexual offenders, strengthen community notification of sex offenders, and help build awareness of how people can protect themselves and their children.

In addition, during the 2004 session, a task force was established to study the use of global positioning systems and investigate the feasibility of outfitting sex offenders and other violent criminals with global positioning anklets, which would keep track of their whereabouts at all times. The final report by the task force (submitted on December 31, 2005) made several recommendations, including that GPS technology be utilized on persons that are a high risk to public safety and when location is of a primary concern,

that a State-funded pilot program be undertaken, and that the GPS task force be institutionalized.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Legislative Services, Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

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