

Youth Registration: A Misguided Approach to Addressing Sexual Harm

Registration laws were created to protect children and communities from sexual harm. But time and research have shown that registries and community notification laws do not make communities safer. Instead they cause significant damage, particularly when applied to youth.

*Thirty-nine states now include children as young as 8, 10, and 12-years-old on sex offense registries. These policies **sweep children into a punitive system originally created to protect them, and violate their basic rights** to be treated separately and confidentially in juvenile court. The harm befalling youth accused of sex offenses is severe. A [2013 Human Rights Watch report](#) based on interviews with over 500 people placed on the registry as children found that youth registrants experience:*



Grave mental health consequences. 85% reported serious mental health consequences as a result of registration. Registrants are stigmatized and isolated. Many consider suicide, and some succeed.



Harassment and physical violence. 52% experienced violence as children as a result of registration. Youth registrants are sometimes shot at, beaten, even murdered; many are repeatedly threatened with violence.



Barriers to housing and shelter. Over 44% experienced homelessness as children due to restrictions that came with registration.



Barriers to employment. 63% faced serious employment and financial challenges due to registration, even while burdened with mandatory fees. Doors to education are also often closed.



Disrupted families. 77% reported that registration significantly harmed their families, including their own children and victim-relatives. Families of youth registrants often confront enormous obstacles in living together—often because registrants are prohibited from living with other children.

“Under the law at the time, he was looking at being put on the public registry. His picture, address and information on the Web ... He just couldn't bear it.”

~ Linda L., Grand Rapids, Michigan whose son was convicted of a sex offense at 12 and committed suicide at age 17.

Why Reform Youth Registration Laws?

- **No Evidence.** There is no evidence that registration laws prevent future crimes, after more than two decades in existence.
- **Violate Children's Rights.** Children are often placed on the registry *without adequate due process*. The juvenile system was created to treat children differently than adults, but registration laws treat them similarly to adults convicted in adult courts.
- **Recidivism Rates Near Zero.** Recidivism among children who commit sexual offenses is believed to be between 4% and 5%; *a 2010 study found as low as 1%*.
- **Diminish Public Safety.** Placing children on the registry *floods it with low-risk individuals*, exhausting public safety resources.
- **Children are Different than Adults.** Children charged with sex offenses *do not become adults who commit sex offenses*; studies fail to find a link.
- **Expensive and Ineffective.** There is no empirical evidence that notification laws reduce the incidence of sex offenses. This suggests that they may have *no social benefits and only social costs*.
- **Irreparable Harm.** Approximately *200,000 people are on the registry for things they did when they were children*. People raised on registries and their families suffer the severe material and psychological consequences of deeply flawed policy.

Join The Center on Youth Registration Reform as we reverse damaging registration policies, improve public safety, and spare children the harm of registration. The center is housed at [Impact Justice](#). For more information contact Nicole Pittman at npittman@impactjustice.org. See the Human Rights Watch report, [Raised on the Registry: The Irreparable Harm of Placing Children on Sex Offender Registries in the US](#), for more about the impact of registering children. This report represents the first examination of the collateral consequences of registration for children.