

Opponents Of Violent Offender Registry Say Bill Will Not Improve Public Safety

A proposal to establish a registry of violent offenders would lead to unintended consequences, opponents of the measure said Tuesday.

The legislation ([SB 67](#)) will only worsen Ohio's prison overcrowding problem, attorney Rena Passas told members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"Registries prevent those who are forced to register from obtaining gainful employment and housing in many instances," she said.

"This generally leads to instability for the offender, which in turn leads to violations of registry requirements, which then leads to a new criminal conviction, and potentially another term of incarceration. The cycle continues, even if that person will never go on to commit a new registry-eligible offense."

Daniel Dew, criminal justice fellow at the Buckeye Institute, said it is hard to measure the impact of the bill because of its vagueness on who would be required to register, for how long and if there would be a tiered system.

However, he said similar registries in other states have not proven to improve public safety.

Wendy Tarr, director of the Vincentian Ohio Action Network, told the story of a woman who was the victim of domestic violence for many years and eventually killed her abuser in self-defense. After she was convicted of murder, she successfully appealed her conviction with a battered woman's syndrome defense.

"While I understand that the bill is born out of a desire to form a safer society, it carries unintended consequences that could have life or death implications for restored citizens and people who have also been victims of crimes, such as this woman," she said.

"It may be easy to dismiss a personal testimony as an isolated event or an exception to the norm, but this woman wanted me to emphasize that she knows many others who find themselves in similar situations, threatened by the friends or families of their abusers."

Ezra Foster of Healing Broken Circles brought up the case of Brian Golsby, who is accused of murdering an Ohio State University student shortly after his release from prison. At the time of the murder, Mr. Golsby was on the sex offender registry and wearing an ankle bracelet to track his movements.

"My question is, why are we replicating something that isn't working in the first place?" he asked.

Barbara Wright of Families & Individuals for Reform also compared the proposal to the registration of sex offenders. She said the sex offender registry has removed judicial discretion and has made it more difficult for law enforcement to track dangerous offenders because low-level offenders are lumped in with the worst of the worst.

"Many agree that reform of sex offender registration is necessary. But change is slow and uncertain. This committee has the opportunity to avoid those problems and create legislation which is narrow in scope and truly helpful to law enforcement," she said.

The panel also received written proponent testimony from the Ohio Association of Local Reentry Coalitions, the Ohio Prison Project, a University of Toledo professor and the Ohio Public Defender.

Fulton County Sheriff Roy Miller provided written testimony in support of the measure. He helped investigate the murder of Sierah Joughin, for whom the bill is named.

The accused killer, he said, had a history of committing violent crimes.

"I do not have a crystal ball to know how different the outcome of Sierah's case would have been if there would have been a law like this in place," he said. "I do know that if such a law had existed, the suspect would have been spoken to sooner."

Patrick M. Higgins

Ohio Poverty Law Center | Attorney & OLAF Justice for All Fellow

[1108 City Park Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43206](#)

Office: (614) 824-2504 | Mobile: (614) 216-5299

Email: phiggins@ohiopovertylaw.org
