

BRANDED FOR LIFE: SEX OFFENDER

Readers respond to story of young lives ruined

Editor's note: What follows is a sampling of the outpouring of e-mails and letters sent to Publisher Don Dodd and Staff Writer Brenda Cannon Stancil of The Examiner in response to the Feb. 24 story on a Texas law that punishes young men involved in consensual sexual relationships with young women who are at least 36 months younger.

That original story is reprinted below.

Dear Editor,

I wanted to write and thank you for the article you did on consensual teenage sex.

I have a very close family member who is going through the same thing. I think it is so sad.

I appreciate your help in teaching the public and other parents about this situation.

Jennifer L. Salazar, Houston

Dear Editor,

Thank you for getting the word out. It is very much appreciated.

You have only scratched the surface of this subject and there are many more horror stories related to this abuse of Texas law.

Thank you again for your article.

Trudy Singleton, Southeast Texas

Dear Editor,

I am so grateful for the article — It is so good to know that the word is getting out. My son had a complete nervous breakdown last week and spent three days in the mental hospital. He is undergoing a bitter divorce and the pressures from his unreasonable probation became too much for him.

He did not know who he was, where he was, the date or anything tangible. During the psychiatric evaluation, the doctor asked what was bothering him and he broke down in tears and said, "I am a loser. They tell me I am a sexual pervert and will never amount to anything and I lost my family. I am worthless."

That statement came from a broken hearted, grief-ridden young man who in 1998 graduated with honors, was happy and optimistic and was fac-

ing a great career with the U.S. Air Force until this probation came along.

It has whittled him down to a weeping, paranoid pessimist.

We are trying to get him some help. I am retiring in December and we bought some lake property in Oklahoma and are going to try to take him with us. His probation officer has already said that he probably cannot go. I told her that he is now unemployed due to disabilities and cannot find living or work arrangements here in the metroplex because of the probation. I asked her, "So the alternative is for him to become homeless and on welfare because of this probation or the worst case — possibly kill himself over the stress?"

I am so outraged. I want to donate more time to the cause of educating others but with his divorce, losing his children and his mental condition, I guess I am to my own maximum right now.

Thank you again for the article — It gave me hope. You are awesome people.

Take care and God bless you all,

Brenda, Fort Worth

Dear Editor,

Pertaining to the laws found in Chapter 62 as they are written, I hope you will read "Findings of the Committee," and especially that parts listed under "Other Concerns." This shows what we are up against in changing these laws, violation of federal acts and especially funding. We cannot get an exemption for these unfortunate teenagers because the State would lose valuable funding. Funding that goes to everything else but the sex offenders. They have to pay their own way.

Even if simple wording of what Chapter 62 considers a sexually violent offense (anyone who is over the age of 17) could do the trick. I think it would still be an uphill battle because of funding. And, that is the crime!

Cathy

Dear Mr. Dodd,

Today I am taking my hat off to you for FINALLY printing the truth about what is happening to our sons!

For far too long, they have been branded as perverts and predators and have had their lives ruined by this registry. The public needs to know too many are being branded along with real criminals and this just should not be. If the young people do not know what "may happen" to them, pretty soon there will be enough names on this registry nationwide to fill a library.

I am sure this is not what was intended for our citizens at the start of this list. This should BE ONLY for the severe cases where a real criminal who has been in jail, let out and hurt another child.

Phoebe

Dear Ms. Stancil,

Thank you so much for having the courage to write "Branded for Life, Sex Offender." I live in Indianapolis, Indiana and my grandson was arrested for consensual sexual acts.

His ordeal is finally over, but I am continuing to fight for other boys who have no idea they can be arrested for this.

I will forward your article to The Indianapolis Star. Our organization, FACES, (Families and Children Exploited Sexually) has been trying to get this story out for over two years. The media seems to be afraid to touch it.

I hope in future articles you will be describing the hell these kids go through during the course of "therapy." My grandson is now in therapy to undo all the damage that was done to him. Resolute is the largest juvenile sex offender treatment in Indiana, and the people who started it came from Texas. I'm sure the therapy is the same. I feel that is designed to embarrass, demean and destroy self-confidence in these kids. Needless to say the institutions make a ton of money from it.

Janet B., Indianapolis, Ind.

Ms. Stancil,

Thank you so much for this article. I am an advocate for the decriminal-

February 28, 2005

Dear Editor,
I commend you on this article.
I'm glad to see someone helping these moms after their sons have dealt with this injustice.

I, for one, know just how Tony was. He was a good and caring person and my son's best friend. My son and Tony were like brothers. Tony thought of us as his other Dad and Mom. My family watched him suffer for his mistake and how he felt depressed and upset at not being able to visit his own sister on her birthday. This boy, like so many others, was judged guilty because of the way the law is written. These laws need to be changed. Most of the cases involving young kids need to be looked at differently. These kids are not pedophiles and molesters, just kids who made a bad mistake.

I want to thank you for printing this article.

Sincerely,
**Sandra Smith
Vidor**

ization of consensual teenage sex. I have examined these ill written laws, front to back and realize we have a lot of work ahead to right a wrong. These laws were made with good intention, to keep our communities safe, and so they should. But somehow with proper legal wording, remove these entrapped teenagers from being branded for life.

On a more personal note, my heart is breaking each time I think of my son and his branded future.

Cathy

Dear Mr. Dodd,

The story on Save Our TexSONS really hit home with me. My son just went to prison for 20 years because a young girl lied about her age and was willing to have sex. He left behind a son who just turned two yesterday and a child I may possibly never know.

This is heart wrenching for me as a mother and has caused a deep depression throughout my family.

We, too, are a stable two-parent family unit with rules. However, these girls sneak out of their homes and their parents have no idea where they are. When they find out that they had sex, it is not their fault at all. They blame all fault on the boys and this is wrong.

I feel this discrimination and law must be changed.

You can murder someone in this state and get less time than having consensual sex with a girl who is usually the aggressor. I want to help change the law and I want to see my son out of prison. He is not a criminal — just an immature man.

Donna, Sulphur Springs, Texas

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Branded for Life: SEX OFFENDER

**By Brenda Cannon Stancil
Staff Writer**

Editor's note: This was the first segment of a three-part series dealing with consensual teen sex and the consequences.

Due to the outpour of calls, letters and e-mails, we chose to reprint Part One of the series

Part Two begins on Page 8 and Part Three will appear in the March 10 edition.

Teen night at a local club, a church youth group outing, surfing the Internet or hanging out in the neighborhood shopping mall sets the stage for a seductive-looking young lady and the young man who is attracted to her.

Because she is there, makes her-

self available and often does not tell the truth about her age, wanting to appear older, young males are faced with a serious challenge. How old does she appear to be? How old does she say she is? How old is she in reality?

The choice made to engage in consensual sex can foster a lifetime of agony and heartache if the incident is reported to authorities. Texas has very tough laws on the

books concerning the sexual assault of a child and judges have little discretion in meting out sentences.

A 36-month difference in age and charges being filed by the "victim," or someone on her behalf, is putting Texas teens in places they've never even imagined.

And many parents do not know that consensual sex, even when the female is the initiator, is currently being punished by the State of Texas based solely on the difference in ages. The boy can be 17 and the girl 14, but if the difference is 36 months or more, sexual assault of a

child charges can be filed.

Tana Fillingame, a Vidor resident, knows this all too well from personal experience. Her son, Tony, died in a motorcycle accident and carried to his grave the title of registered sex offender. Tony's name and personal information were listed on the Department of Public Safety's Web site and he was branded in his community. Fillingame said, "My son was a registered sex offender because of an encounter he had with a 13-year-old girl who lied about her age."

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