

BRANDED FOR LIFE: SEX OFFENDER

LETTERS

from page 11

Dear Mr. Dodd,

We want to commend you for printing the article, "Branded for Life, Sex Offender." The article is very well written and explains the dilemma that so many young men across the country find themselves facing.

We are co-founders of a similar group in Michigan, Citizens for Second Chances, and we have been working for several years to get our legislators to realize the harm that Megan's Law and other such registry laws have done. While we have had some success, too many legislators feel that the public would perceive them to be soft on crime if they supported legislation to allow judges the discretion to decide what cases and defendants are worthy of the label of "sex offender" and all the stigma attached to it.

The public must recognize that the registry is in addition to any criminal consequences and the Supreme Court has stated that the registry is not intended to be punitive. We think that it would be extremely difficult to find any person listed on such a registry that has not felt the punitive effects of being required to register. We absolutely believe that many involved in the drafting of this type of far reaching legislation fully intend for this to be a punitive measure to each person on the registry, their families and friends. Legislators will claim that this is for public safety and to protect the children. What about the children of the offender? Do they deserve the protection of the law and the embrace of the community? These types of laws only serve to isolate and ostracize the offender and their families.

We were very moved by this article and we have heard many stories such as these. We pray that the public will see this over-broad law needs to be revised before we destroy any more lives. These laws are more structured for public humiliation than for public safety.

Texas has a wonderful opportunity to lead the country in recognizing the need for changes to the registry laws. With the wonderful support group, Save Our TexSONS, and mothers such as Tana Fillingame, an entire generation of promiscuous teens (both male and female) will have an opportunity to learn from their mistakes without being branded for life as a sex offender. Let us give our children the second chances to move on and become productive and contributing members of society.

Barb Lambourne
Linda Zimmerman
Citizens for Second Chances
Post Office Box 84
Grand Haven, Michigan 49417-0084

Dear Editor,

I am asking for legislation to stop this "jailbait" scenario and asking that it be made a felony for any girl,

age 13-17, to misrepresent her age in an effort to deceive a man where sex could be a possible encounter, or for any person, ages 13 and up, to make a false allegation of sexual assault.

I am also asking that they have to register as a sex offender also.

Someone has got to speak up for the falsely accused.

There are men who have been falsely accused of sexual assault by vindictive scorned women, bitter ex-wives and stepchildren, who have had their lives ruined as well. Their names and faces are on the sex offender registry as well.

A Dallas, Texas Mother

Dear Brenda,

I want to personally thank you for this article.

A letter and a copy of this article are going in the mail today to Laura Bush at her Crawford, Texas residence.

My son is serving a 25-year prison sentence in Texas for this. Hold on to your seat. Here is our story:

In 2001, my 23-year-old son was sentenced to 25 years in prison for consensual sexual encounters with a girl who, in 1995, not only lied about her age, but also tried to blackmail my son into a relationship with her. When he refused, she ruined his life. My son told the police the truth about his encounters with the girl, NOT knowing the consequences of the charges against him. Once this happened, as parents, we were helpless to help him.

The gates of hell opened in 1995 for my then 17-year-old son.

When my son was arrested and interrogated about the alleged crime, he admitted to consensual sex with the young lady, stating that she told him she was 17, and that he used a condom, not understanding the nature of the charges against him. The investigator then told my son to sign a statement the investigator had written, admitting to consensual sex with her, and they would let him go. They then took him to Lew Sterret Justice Center in Dallas. He did not understand what he had done wrong. He had done what teenagers have been doing since the beginning of time.

We were told by his Dallas County Public Defender that there was no defense for this charge. My son wanted a trial by jury, and was told by his public defender attorney that he had to plead guilty in order to get probation, and going before a jury with the statement he had signed would be too risky. He was told he should plead before the judge. The ramifications and conflicts of adult probation and mandatory sex offender registration running concurrently were never explained to my son, or to his parents. He was originally give five years probation, and the State demanded mandatory sex offender registration.

He was essentially set up to fail on that point, as it is a near impossibility to meet the requirements of both in an ideal situation, much less for a 17-year-old kid with no skills to earn a living to meet all the financial responsibilities of the two. He violated his probation on technicalities such as by not being able to pay the weekly sex offender therapy fees, or meet the other financial and reporting responsibilities of court costs, fines and adult probation, because very few employers will hire a registered sex offender, he was restricted from most jobs.

He was also violated because he refused to admit he was a pervert or a pedophile in sex offender treatment, and refused to allow them to place a plethysmograph on his penis, and place him in front of child porn in a clinical setting to test him for arousal. Both are a requirement of sex offender laws in Texas. (Static 99).

His family was helpless to help him as we have small children in our households. He could not live with us.

Some teenage boys are committing suicide over this same situation. This is a sad reality for my son, but he is better off in prison, as the laws are now, than being ostracized as a sex offender in the free world. Many, including the falsely accused, are facing the same consequences.

The State of Texas is dragging its feet on changing these laws, due to the fact it will lose millions in federal law enforcement funding under Megan's Law and the Jacob Wetterling Act, if they change the laws. Essentially, they are lining their pockets with federal funding at the expense of these young men's lives and the lives of the falsely accused.

The public at large is being woefully misled by many of the names on the sex offender registry. My son, and others like him, is no threat to public safety.

This hysteria has got to stop.

You are welcome to use our story, but please exclude my name, as it could put my son in life endangerment in the prison system.

Mary, Dallas

Dear Mr. Dodd,

What a wonderful heart-wrenching article, "Branded for Life." I live in Michigan and unfortunately at the ripe age of 13, my son was experimenting and was also branded a sex offender. Because he was charged as a child, he will only have to register for 25 years as a fourth degree misdemeanor CSC.

But the other side is now that he is considered a sex offender, anyone who knows about this can make a complaint and he is charged. For instance, my daughter has three children with the same man. They broke up. Her now ex-boyfriend and his family wanted custody of the three

children and went to the state police and filed a complaint stating my son hurt these children. The oldest child is eight years old and denied that anything ever happened. In fact, he swore to this truth.

The state took the kids away from my daughter for six weeks until we got to court. The attorney fee, just to hire him on the case, was \$10,000, non-refundable, and the cost would continue to go up if the case went to trial. The attorney warned us that it could run as much as \$60,000 before it was over. My parents mortgaged their home to pay the attorney. Our first day in court, it came out that this family was only fighting for custody and nothing happened. Charges were dismissed, but at what cost to my son and my grandchildren and our families.

My daughter now has her children back, but we no longer allow them over when my son is home to protect him from false accusations. The sad thing is the police or prosecutor would not even file charges on the ex-boyfriend and his family for filing a false report because, after all, my son is a convicted sex offender.

The laws in Michigan are totally unfair to children like my son. Sounds like Texas is just as bad. The new witch-hunt of the century is these types of so-called crimes.

I commend you for having the guts and moral to be able to put together such a well-written article telling the other side. I hope it helps to change the laws.

There are victims of sex crimes, and those are awful, but children playing doctor, or like the young man in your article are victims of the system.

God bless you and the young men falsely accused of these so-called crimes.

Michigan Mother

Dear Editor,

We are so proud of you for doing a story on sex offenders.

This has been so unfair to young men to be caught up with young females who do not tell the truth about their age.

I am a female and even I couldn't tell their age from just looking at them. I was at my sister's home the other day and I was looking at my

young niece. I had to question my sister as to my niece's age. She is very tall and looks very mature to me. She is only ten years old, and as her aunt, I thought she looked about 16 at least. The law is one sided and needs to be changed.

Thank you again,
L. H., Houston

Dear Mr. Dodd,

Thank you so much for the article, "Branded for Life." This is a serious subject. I was a parent completely ignorant of such laws and could not even imagine it happening to my family. But once you find out the real truth, too late.

All parents need to be updated on how our laws have been amended, and how new federal acts have mandated the states concerning sex offenders. These laws have severely trapped our teenagers and given them sex offender status.

Hopefully, your future articles concerned federal and state laws will help parents realize the dangers. I feel the punishment is far worse that that for violations for alcohol, smoking and drugs.

I have examined these ill written laws, front to back, and though they were written to keep our communities safe, they have only destroyed many teenagers by some simple words pertaining to age. Teenagers who have consensual sex should not be charged with a sexually violent offense based solely on their age.

I feel the bottom line on not being able to change these laws that entrap these teenagers is funding and that is the crime.

C. Morton

Dear Mr. Dodd,

I sent my son, Chris, who is an attorney in Chicago, a link to the article about teenage sex offenders written by Brenda Cannon Stancil. Here is his response.

"Excellent article. I actually had to participate in a couple of those prosecutions when I worked for the District Attorney's office. They were pretty ugly.

Even the prosecutors hated handling them."

Martha Ladd



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