

Schickel seeks changes in state sex offender laws

By JOHN SKIPPER, Of The Globe Gazette

MASON CITY — As the Iowa Legislature heads down the home stretch, Rep. Bill Schickel said Monday he intends to press for revisions to Iowa's sex offender residency law.

“There is a perception that that the Legislature does not plan to act on this issue,” Schickel said. “This is critical legislation for this session. That is the message I have conveyed to my fellow lawmakers and the chair of our Public Safety Committee.”

Schickel said he has met with officials from Mason City, the Cerro Gordo County Attorney, the sheriff's department and the Iowa Department of Corrections. “Their unanimous opinion is that the residency restrictions, while well-intended, are actually making citizens less safe.”

The current law bars people convicted of sex crimes against children from living within 2,000 feet of a school or childcare center. It was adopted in 2002.

Schickel said revisions being considered include:

Establishing “no trespassing” zones that would prohibit sex offenders from entering or loitering around areas as parks, schools and playgrounds.

Establishing criteria that differentiate between an adult who sexually violates young children and a teenager who may have had consensual sex with another teen.

Giving judges additional discretion over whom the 2000-foot residency restrictions should apply to.

Schickel said the law enforcement officials have told him changes are necessary because the current law is turning some neighborhoods and rural areas into “sex offender havens.”

Also, he said, the current law makes it more difficult for law enforcement officials to keep track of sex offenders because many have “gone underground.”

Schickel said all of this increases rather than decreases the risk factors for re-offending.

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