

Panel: Repeal 2,000-foot sex offender law (Guest View)

By MASON CITY SEX OFFENDER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Currently in Iowa, convicted sex offenders whose victims were minors may not live within 2,000 feet of a school or child-care facility. The Mason City Council appointed our six-member committee to study this law and make recommendations as to what would best protect the children of Mason City from sex offenders.

We have been meeting regularly since August studying the issue, received public input at two forums and met with area law enforcement and corrections personnel.

It is apparent to our committee that the 2,000-foot residency restriction for sex offenders creates a false sense of security and has actually made our community less safe for children.

The law does not limit where sex offenders can go, only where they live. They are still free to hang out in places where children frequent.

Prior to the law, officers in our area felt like they could keep track of registered sex offenders who lived here and their re-offense rate was very low. Since the 2,000-foot law, many offenders have been forced to move around, looking for places to stay that are not banned and many offenders can't be found.

They are also more likely to re-offend due to the resultant stress and instability in their lives and because they are forced to live in clusters with other sex offenders.

Our committee unanimously believes children would be safer if the 2,000-foot residency law was repealed by the Iowa Legislature and it was replaced with "restricted" or "no trespassing" zones which would prohibit offenders from entering or loitering near areas where children play or frequent.

A city ordinance to do this is currently being worked on by our committee with the help of the city attorney. We would like to be a model for the state in how to more effectively protect children from sex offenders and hope it could be enacted by the state Legislature.

We also want parents to realize that 90 percent of child sexual abuse cases involve people that the child knows and trusts. These can be friends of the family, neighbors, group leaders, relatives, or even family members.

We will be putting out more information on how parents can protect children from these situations at a later date.

— Members are Tanya Kantaris, Jon Petersen, Candi Schickel, Dan Courtney, Lisa Hugi and Joey Van Zomeran.