

Monitor or lock up child sex abusers (Globe Gazette Editorial)

Reacting to the current raised public consciousness in this state regarding sex crimes against children, lawmakers are considering increasing the penalties for such acts.

Provided that the new laws are reasonably crafted to target adults who sexually abuse children, the idea makes a lot of sense.

Senate Co-President Jeff Lamberti, R-Ankeny, and Sen. Larry McKibben, R-Marshalltown, said they will introduce a bill on the opening day of the upcoming session of the Iowa Legislature to impose 25-year mandatory prison sentences and up to life in prison for those convicted of certain sex crimes against children 12 years and younger.

Senate Democratic Leader Mike Gronstal of Council Bluffs said the plan floated by Lamberti and McKibben last week “makes sense.”

The law they are proposing is modeled after “Jessica’s Law” in Florida, which includes these provisions:

- * Requires sex offenders to wear electronic monitors after they are released from prison to track their location.

- * Turns kidnapping with intent to sexually assault into a “one strike” offense, meaning the perpetrator will be put behind bars for 25 years to life.

- * Increases the penalties for almost all sexual offenses against children and makes it easier for a sexual offender to be labeled a sexually violent predator so he can be held in prison or a psychiatric institution.

The new penalties to be proposed in Iowa would apply to anyone convicted of lascivious acts with a child, sexual exploitation of a minor and second-degree sexual abuse. The law would also give judges the option of imposing a life prison term after considering the circumstances of the case.

As Lamberti told Charlotte Eby, a reporter for the Globe Gazette’s Des Moines Bureau, “If you commit a sex act with an individual who is 12 years or younger and you are an adult, there is no gray area.”

Almost every state is looking at passing at least some parts of Jessica’s Law, named after 9-year-old Jessica Lunsford, who was abducted, raped and murdered by a convicted sex offender in Florida in March.

There’s a danger after some heinous act such as the Jetseta Gage abuse and murder in Iowa, also in March, that lawmakers will play on public passions by passing laws that merely make it look like

they're being tough on crime.

But it's clear that many sexual abusers of children cannot be rehabilitated and will continue to assault children when given the opportunity.

In the case of adults convicted of sexually abusing children, we either need ways to closely and accurately monitor their movements or we need to keep them behind bars.

Agree? Disagree? Write to the Editor's Mailbag, Box 271, Mason City, IA 50402-0271, or to news@globegazette.com.