

Summary of testimony given by Fred Smith to the Special Commission to Reduce the Recidivism of Sex Offenders on May 28, 2015

The following is a summary of the testimony given by Fred Smith, former Director of Program Development for St. Francis House, a large day shelter in downtown Boston and virtually the only human service provider that welcomed people convicted of sex offenses into its full array of services including medical, food, clothing, job readiness and, most significantly, its single room occupancy housing. Based on the Shelter's and Mr. Smith's 16 + years of actively working with this population these are his observations:

- Of the hundreds of men (and several women) served from this population, only one individual who received shelter services including housing, committed another sex offense. (It should be noted, that crime involved internet pornography and that individual served another 5 years in prison. He is now working and living in the community as a productive citizen.)
- Of all the Leveled offenders Mr. Smith worked with, at least 3 chose to commit suicide under the burden of the registration and reporting system.
- Many of the older offenders Mr. Smith worked with were products of the Commonwealth's institutional "care" system. The now mostly dismantled system of State Schools for the Feeble Minded, Insane Asylums, Industrial Schools for Recalcitrant Children, Group Homes and the Foster Care System all contributed to their residents' maladjustment socially, behaviorally and their difficulty securing stable employment and housing. Thus, you have the Commonwealth contributing significantly to these folks aberrant behaviors and decision making and then the Commonwealth punishes them for these behaviors and then, upon release, further exacerbates their dismal lives by driving them into the shadows using registration laws in the name of public safety.
- Citing a major study by University of Michigan Law Professor J. J. Prescott in 2012 that looked at SOR practices in 10 states over 15 years that concluded these Registries contribute to greater sex offender recidivism. Remember, the sex offender registry movement was spurred by one high profile crime involving a stranger on stranger offense, an exceedingly rare occurrence.
- There are virtually no resources provided for the reintegration of sex offenders. (Most of the existing re-entry programs, especially housing, specifically forbid serving sex offenders.)
- Like with most of us, the two most critical elements of a stable and productive life are housing and jobs (not to mention having someone who cares about you) Without family support, this population is effectively unemployable and unhouseable. Since approximately 80% of all Level 3 sex offenders in the City of Boston use a shelter, or the streets, as their address, clearly the sex offender registry is the major contributor to this crisis.

The following are Mr. Smith's recommendations to the commission:

1. Create Support and Accountability Centers with the ability to provide a variety of services including access to benefits, introduction to peer support groups, acquiring basic documentation for Identification and referrals to appropriate resources including intensive Circles of Support and Accountability.
2. Indemnify housing providers and employers to reduce the perceived risk of providing housing and employment to registered sex offenders.

3. Continue to develop the self employment/micro enterprise model of employment through homeless incubators.
4. Eliminate the SORB, (remember you already have a Criminal Offender Record Information Board that also provides offender information to those with a need to know). If not elimination, at the very least recommend a best practices, actuarial tool to identify those at a real risk of reoffending and make sure they take advantage of support and accountability centers, electronic monitoring and other supervisory tools that have demonstrated their effectiveness.
5. Provide more training and guidance to Probation and Parole Officers so they do not hinder the reintegration process by overreaching their authority by imposing unnecessary restrictions.