Draft Interagency Cooperation to address Sex Offender Recidivism

The comprehensive work of the statutorily created Commission to reduce Sex Offender Recidivism has illustrated the benefits of bringing together multiple stakeholders, experts and interested parties to share perspectives and knowledge about how to best identify ways to reduce recidivism and ultimately prevent sexual violence in the Commonwealth. Effective, evidence-based approaches to assessment, intervention and prevention of sexually offending behavior must engage and cross multiple disciplines and areas of expertise. New research is continuously evolving our understanding of best practices and outcomes and should thus be driving public policy in our communities and throughout the Commonwealth. In order to capture this evidence and continuously improve practice and ultimately reduce the incidence of sexual violence, we recommend engaging multiple disciplines in the form of an ongoing Interagency Council to continuously evaluate whether our approaches are working to optimally prevent sexual violence.

Representative Kay Khan has introduced legislation to the Massachusetts Legislature that would create such a council (H2145, An Act relative to the creation of the interagency council on the management of adult and juvenile sexual offenders). This legislation establishes a framework for the ongoing work toward prevention of sexual violence through the treatment and management of sexually offending behavior. In this model, the Interagency Council would be tasked with: (1) recommending research-based methods of assessment, treatment and risk management for sex offenders (addressing adult and adolescent offenders separately); (2) establishing and implementing guidelines and standards for the assessment, treatment and management of sex offenders in all locations and stages of the criminal justice and human services systems; and (3) recommending a system by which progress and evidenced based outcomes in the assessment, treatment and management of adult offenders will be measured. The agencies serving sex offenders will report progress to the Council on implementation the Council’s recommendations relative to outcomes of assessment, treatment and management guidelines. The Council may also make recommendations with regard to education and policy approaches regarding prevention of sexual violence and reducing recidivism, as well as inform consideration of the professionalization of sex offender-specific treatment in the Commonwealth.

Such a council must include stakeholders from all agencies engaged in the assessment, treatment and management of individuals with sexually offending behaviors. Additionally, an essential voice in all aspects of this work is the one of sexual violence survivors. Community based rape crisis centers hold critical knowledge and expertise about the experience of survivors, and the prevention of sexual violence, in their communities and must be part of any multi-disciplinary approach to reducing sex offense recidivism.