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 reach across and engage 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 take advantage of and maximally implement 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 charged to continuously evaluate whether our approaches are working optimally to 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 should also be charged with making recommendations about education and policy approaches that target both the prevention of sexual violence and the reduction of recidivism. Under the purview of the Council should also be consideration of the professionalization of sex offender-specific treatment in the Commonwealth.

In the discussions of the Commission it became evident that the sharing of information about offenders across agencies so that treatment and management could be maximized was suboptimal and led both to the duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in practice. It is therefore also recommended that the Council be charged with establishing an information sharing system that is secure and protects the rights of the offenders, but also maximally aids appropriate cross-agency sharing of data and ratings essential for treatment and management of sex offenders.

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.