



Are Sex Offender Laws Counterproductive?

Emotions and passions overflowed Monday evening in Conestoga when more than 300 residents packed the community firehouse to discuss safety concerns over a property that is the residence of four convicted felons, three of whom are registered sexual offenders on Pennsylvania's Megan's List. Below are excerpts* from an international organization respected for protecting the rights of both victims and perpetrators:

"Human Rights Watch appreciates the sense of concern and urgency that has prompted these laws. They reflect a deep public yearning for safety in a world that seems increasingly threatening. ...

"Unfortunately, our research reveals that sex offender registration, community notification, and residency restriction laws are ill-considered, poorly crafted, and may cause more harm than good:

"The registration laws are overbroad in scope and overlong in duration, requiring people to register who pose no safety risk;

"Under community notification laws, anyone anywhere can access online sex offender registries for purposes that may have nothing to do with public safety. Harassment of and violence against registrants have been the

predictable result;

"In many cases, residency restrictions have the effect of banishing registrants from entire urban areas and forcing them to live far from their homes and families.

"The evidence is overwhelming, as detailed in this report, that these laws cause great harm to the people subject to them. On the other hand, proponents of these laws are not able to point to convincing evidence of public safety gains from them...

"Many child safety and rape prevention advocates believe that millions of dollars are being misspent on registration and community notification programs that do not get at the real causes of child sexual abuse and adult sexual violence. They would like to see more money spent on prevention, education, and awareness programs for children and adults, counseling for victims of sexual violence, and programs that facilitate treatment and the transition back to society for convicted sex offenders.

"As one child advocate told Human Rights Watch, 'When a sex offender succeeds in living in the community, we are all safer.'"

* Human Rights Watch: "No Easy Answers. Sex Offender Laws in the US"
<http://hrw.org/reports/2007/us0907/1.htm>

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Reporter George Sheldon Joins *NewsLanc.com*

A lifelong Lancaster County native, George Sheldon is well-known as a local writer, author, and photographer.

Sheldon's writing credits include the publication of over 1,000 articles. He has also published 31

books, with two more scheduled for publication later this year. His website is www.GeorgeSheldon.com

Sheldon looks forward to meeting *NewLanc.com's* readers when he is handing out newsletters in the greater Lancaster community.

New Era Urges Defeat of Charter as Proposed

The *New Era* on May 17th published a thoughtful and provocative editorial highly critical of the proposed Home Rule Charter as currently constituted. Excerpts:

"Many here hoped home rule would bring progressive reform. Instead, it promises just the opposite – a government regressive and deformed."

"But the charter up for a vote in November's election is filled with flaws – major flaws that would wreck the balance of power in this county and open it to a form of political bossism not seen since the 1920s."

"It robs voters of a direct voice in choosing the

county's executive branch."

"It subverts the independent authority of the district attorney and controller. It politicizes now-independent authorities. It puts subpoena powers where they do not belong."

"In its present form, the proposed home-rule charter deserves defeat at the ballot box."

"It's not too late. The commission members have until Sept. 4 to make substantive changes."

A further sign of a return to responsible journalism would for the *Intelligencer Journal* or the *Sunday News* to set forth an equally thorough and forceful defense of the Charter as now constituted.

EDITORIAL: Rational vs. Irrational Fear

The good people of Conestoga and the rest of us need to learn to avoid being misled by our inherent fears and thus allowing ourselves to be misled by others.

Fear can be good. Ten thousand years ago it helped humankind to survive predators in the jungle where every sound, every movement could foretell danger and potential death. And when rational, it can still save us today.

But fear can also be bad, because it can play upon survival instincts which are incapable of discerning between degrees of danger.

Driving a car exposes us to risks a hundred times

greater than those posed by sex offenders, especially those who have spent years in prison, who are now much older and more responsible, and are being observed.

The USA has the highest rate of incarceration in the world - even greater than the most authoritarian and repressive regimes. There are two million people in our prisons and most of them will be released one of these days. Ex-convicts service our homes and offices; they are parents of our children's friends; they often live and work nearby.

Not knowing their past dose not hurt us. Branding them as sex ex-cons destroys them!

LETTER: Praises Anti-Home Rule Editorial

It is possible that the whole home rule idea started when the Lancaster Newspapers, Inc. was running into challenges from the commissioners?

Now that the challenges have been diverted, the home rule concept is no longer as pressing for the LNP so they can take an objective view.