



Issue: Management of Sex Offenders

Position Statement

The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance supports a comprehensive and balanced approach to enhancing community safety and offender accountability. Such an approach includes adequate funding to effectively provide support for victims and their families within and outside the criminal justice system, to identify, apprehend, prosecute and adjudicate crimes of sexual violence, and to reduce, and ultimately prevent the perpetration of sexual violence.

Rationale:

The Action Alliance recognizes the importance of sex offender management programs as part of a broad spectrum of programs and initiatives needed to provide for victim and community safety and offender accountability. However, a proportional allocation of resources to other programs and services addressing sexual violence, including prevention efforts, is needed to solve this problem in our Commonwealth. An effective approach includes an investment in:

1. Community awareness as an important component to community safety

It is estimated that more than 30,000 adults are sexually assaulted each year in Virginia—a substantially larger number than the 4,687 reported to law enforcement in 2010 or the 18,000 offenders currently on the registry.

Current sex offender policies and laws are focused on stranger danger~ helping people figure out the stranger who poses a danger in their community. However, statistics consistently show that family, friends and acquaintances pose a far greater risk than stranger. In fact, 90% of adult female and 80% of adult male victims in study by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) indicated that they were sexually assaulted by someone they knew. Similarly, another VDH study on child sexual assault showed that 90% of child victims were sexually abused by someone they knew. The management of convicted sex offenders is an important tool in keeping communities safe. Effective policies take into account the continuum of risk and apply the most restrictive policies to high-risk offenders. When applied broadly, sex offender policies may have the following

unintended negative consequences: people being less likely to recognize warning signs of abuse in family members, parents, and others to whom they are close or less likely to seek help for fear of exposing a family member to public disclosure; and an increased risk of re-offense because of the isolation, instability in housing and employment, and loss of income these policies may create for offenders.

Resources must be dedicated to raising community awareness about evidence-informed sexual violence intervention and prevention, including effective sex offender policies and the cost, benefits, and limitations of current sex offender policies.

2. Resources and support for all agencies and systems that respond to sexual violence prior to conviction are also necessary

Sex offender treatment programs, while important, are only a part of the broad spectrum of programs and initiatives needed to provide for enhanced community safety and offender accountability. Other agencies and programs also play a critical role and need support and resources to do their part in reducing sexual violence in Virginia, including law enforcement, victim advocates, forensic nurse examiners, courts, and prosecutors. In addition, studies affirm that coordinated approaches help to keep victims informed and engaged in the criminal justice process.

3. Resources and Support for Sexual Assault Crisis Centers

Sexual Assault Crisis Centers provide the support and information victims need to explore their options and determine how to move forward. In addition to dealing with the myriad of emotional and physical issues from the attack, victims must make numerous decisions, such as whether or not to go to the police, to seek medical attention or to tell someone about the attack. Our experience, as well as research, tells us that without this support, many victims might not go to the police or participate in the criminal justice process, leading to fewer prosecutions, fewer convictions, and fewer known sex offenders in sex offender management programs.

4. Primary prevention efforts aimed at reducing the risk of perpetration of sexual violence.

More resources must be invested in researching why sexual violence continues and developing evidenced-based programming to prevent perpetration of sexual violence from happening in the first place. Currently, the Commonwealth invests \$0 toward the important goal of preventing sexual violence through primary prevention methods. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth fails to provide the necessary resources and support to respond effectively to sexual violence.

For these reasons, the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance supports a comprehensive and balanced approach to enhancing community safety and offender accountability.