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Sex offender housing restrictions may lead to more crimes

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April 08, 2010

After his prison sentence came to an end in April 2007, child sex predator Ronald Dubbins was supposed to undergo one year of tightly controlled supervision as he transitioned back home – with electronic monitoring, mandatory therapy and frequent meetings with a parole officer.

But because he could not find a place to live that met Illinois' ever-expanding sex offender housing restrictions, Dubbins served parole behind bars and then was released into Cook County without monitoring.

Faced with complete freedom, he quickly returned to his predatory ways, attempting to lure young children into his Berwyn apartment for sex, court records show.

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Dubbins' case illustrates a growing danger in Illinois. A Tribune review has found that the state's sex offender housing laws, enacted over the past decade with the goal of protecting the public, may be having the opposite effect.

Thousands of sex offenders have remained in prison for parole and then been returned to the streets without oversight or treatment. These offenders are less likely to register their addresses than those serving tightly monitored paroles in the community. They also are more likely to reoffend, sometimes repeating the same sex crimes, the review found.

For example, within a year of his release, Dubbins was convicted of trying to abduct children between 4 and 12 years old and soliciting sex acts from them. And Khieng Heng, released into Des Plaines, was convicted of aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a young relative, while Jermaine Johnson was charged with killing a man in Chicago with a broken bottle after what investigators said could have been a sexual solicitation gone wrong.

Of the 1,292 sex offenders discharged in fiscal 2008 after serving parole behind bars, 28 percent were listed as missing, not having registered their address or not being up-to-date with their registrations, compared with 23 percent of the 1,868 sex offenders paroled into the community.

Another 21 percent of the discharged offenders returned to prison, a slightly higher rate than those who were paroled. But in most cases, offenders monitored in the community were sent back to prison for technical parole violations, in many cases housing-related problems, while the discharged offenders were convicted of new crimes.

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