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Are Harsher Sex-Offender Laws Yielding Unintended Consequences?

We dedicate this post to all you criminal-law buffs: The Chicago Tribune has an interesting — and somewhat distressing — [article out on Friday](#) about sex offenders, and the treatment we give them after they're convicted.

The lead anecdote is a bit chilling:



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.

According to the Trib, the case illustrates a “growing danger” in Illinois. The sex offender laws there, “enacted over the past decade with the goal of protecting the public,” may actually be doing more harm than good.

Over the years, laws concerning sex offenders have tightened up not just in Illinois, but all over the country. Many states have changed their laws to designate where, exactly, sex-offenders may live. Often they're barred from living near schools and day-care centers, for instance.

In Illinois, those unable to find suitable (and legal) housing after being released are serving their paroles in prison. This may win politicians some easy points — after all, they can tout the development as being good for public safety — but the results aren't always pretty. Reports the Trib:

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.

“There’s a growing awareness that these housing restrictions make politicians feel good, but don’t protect victims or prevent crime,” Kaethe Morris Hoffer, a legal director at the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, told the Trib.

Last month, reports the Trib, the Collaborative on Re-Entry, a coalition of community safety officials from across the state, pledged to find ways to address the unintended consequences of sex offender housing restrictions.

That said, “absent reform, offenders such as Dubbins will continue to walk the streets without oversight.”

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