



Coalition wants to scrap 2,000-foot law

By Dan Gearino

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DES MOINES — A coalition of law-enforcement and victim-advocacy groups came together Monday to ask the Legislature to throw out the state’s 2,000-foot residency restriction on sex offenders.

“Good public policy needs to protect children,” Corwin Ritchie, executive director of the Iowa County Attorneys Association, said at a Statehouse news conference. “This residency requirement doesn’t do that.”

The law bans sex offenders whose victims were children from living within 2,000 feet of a school or day-care center. The measure became law in 2002 but didn’t take effect until last year because of a court challenge.

The coalition wants to replace the 2,000-foot restriction with a new law designating “child safe zones” that would restrict sex offenders from being on the property of a school or day-care center, rather than restrict where the offender can live.

Sen. Keith Kreiman, D-Bloomfield, incoming chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a co-author of the 2,000-foot law, said he expects the Legislature to revise sex offender laws when the next session begins in January. He didn’t say whether he expects the 2,000-foot law to be scrapped.

“I’m confident we’re going to look at what we’ve done before and see what works,” he said.

The problem with the current law, Ritchie said, is that it requires tremendous time and effort to enforce but does little to protect children from sexual abuse.

“We find no correlation between where an offender resides, or sleeps, and whether that offender might re-offend,” he said.

Clay County Sheriff Randy Krukow, president of the sheriffs’ group, said the 2,000-foot law may make children less safe, because its restrictions force offenders to relocate, sometimes without telling law enforcement where they’ve gone.

“Before this law went into effect, I had 99 percent of (sex offenders) registered,” Krukow said.

Now he devotes three members of his 10-person staff to tracking where sex offenders are living. He said that

takes resources away from other areas, such as drug enforcement.

The coalition cites figures from the Iowa Department of Public Safety showing that the number of unaccounted-for sex offenders has more than doubled since the law took effect, rising from 142 to 346.

In addition to the law-enforcement group, the coalition includes the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Prevent Child Abuse Iowa.

Stephen Scott, executive director of Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, said the focus on the 2,000-foot law has distracted the public from the fact that most sex offenses are committed by an acquaintance of the victim.

"We need to chart a different path than the one that has been undertaken," he said.

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