

A STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO THE CIVIL COMMITMENT OF SEX OFFENDERS BILLS

Those of us who have signed this statement come from a wide variety of mental health, sexual assault and domestic violence advocacy programs. While we appreciate that the Legislature wants to address the problem of violent sex offenders, we do not believe the proposed civil commitment in bills S6325 or A9282 is the way to do that.

We live professionally and personally with the human tragedy caused by intimate partner violence. We have spent years convincing legislators, the public, the media, and men and women in power at the federal, state and local levels about sociocultural problems associated with exploitive and assaultive sexual behavior. We have worked to educate our nation to implement procedures to control rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. We have been leaders in dealing with the subterranean phenomena of sexual violence perpetrated in the home by persons close to and known by the victims of sexual violence and exploitation.

As knowledgeable leaders in the fields of sexual dysfunction and the social, legal and penal sanctions which can constrain the aftermath and pain of such dysfunction, we oppose the bills (S. 6325/A. 9282) currently under deliberation by the Joint Senate Assembly Conference Committee on Civil Commitment.

These bills, which have passed the Senate and Assembly, are overbroad, expensive, and misdirected. They lead our state away from strategies that have proven effective and instead propose an untested regime based upon a misunderstanding of the conduct it seeks to address. The bills threaten lifetime incarceration for a small percentage of sex offenders while ignoring the greater danger posed by the larger population of sex offenders who remain untreated and unsupervised due to generally not being identified.

We believe that an integrated system of aggressive monitoring, supervision and treatment should be the model for dealing with sexual violence. This treatment should begin earlier, last longer, and be more targeted than the approach of civil commitment. We believe that the money earmarked for civil commitment should be reserved for the treatment of sexual offenders who can benefit from that treatment. We believe that known sex offenders should receive more intensive treatment, during incarceration and more strategic supervision in the community, on parole and probation.

Sexual assault and abuse prevention and education programs must be expanded. Adequate and appropriate services for all those affected by sexual violence must be sustained and enhanced. Nationally recognized standards for victim services and offender treatment should be required of all providers. Risk assessment instruments designed for the evaluation of sex offenders should be viewed as tools to protect victims, not punish offenders; therefore they must be accurate, state of the art tools, constantly evaluated and studied, refined and improved. We need a free standing, independent, professional entity that commands state level support and provides state level coordination. In fact, a state Office for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence would be ideal to direct and coordinate all of the above.

We come together to ask the Legislature to lay aside the Civil Commitment bills S6325/A9282 and enact genuine, meaningful sex offender legislation this session.

Please forward signature to:

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