

My name is Paul Shannon. I live in Somerville. And I am speaking on behalf of the Sex Offender Policy Reform Initiative in opposition to Senate Bill 2227.

I know people who have served long sentences for committing sexual crimes, some of whom have been civilly committed. Some of them are friends.

They cannot undo the harm they have done. What can they do but try to put their lives together, to live offense free, and to make positive contributions to the world we live in.

And that's exactly what they have done. Many of them of them are also supporting other people on the registry, some of them released from civil commitment, to remain offense free and pick up the pieces of their lives.

Under the Governor's bill, some of them would have been serving mandatory life sentences, others would be locked up in lifetime civil commitment.

As you know, the research clearly shows that people convicted of sexual offenses have a very low rate of recidivism.

And yet this bill would subject even more people who have finished their sentences to long or lifetime civil commitment: not for what they have done, but for what we think they could do, but in all likelihood, will not do.

Although perhaps appropriate under certain conditions and in extreme cases, expanding civil commitment should be unthinkable.

The legitimacy of mandatory minimum sentences has been seriously questioned in the debates that led to the recent passage of the omnibus criminal justice reform bill. Yet the Governor's bill would significantly increase the numbers of not just mandatory sentences, but mandatory life sentences.

We have been down this road before concerning serious drug offenses. It's a road that takes us to a bad place. Better to tailor sentences to what circumstance and justice demand. Present law already allows a judge to impose a life sentence if circumstances warrant.

People who commit sexual offenses don't come from a dark planet. They come from our neighborhoods. They are our parents and children and neighbors.

What's needed are fair trials, sentences that fit the crime and, upon completion of that sentence, access to work, a place to live, and treatment if appropriate.

In combination with effective education and prevention measures, these practices will make us a safer and more just society than mandatory life sentences and lifetime civil commitment ever will.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I would like to make copies available to members of the committee.

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