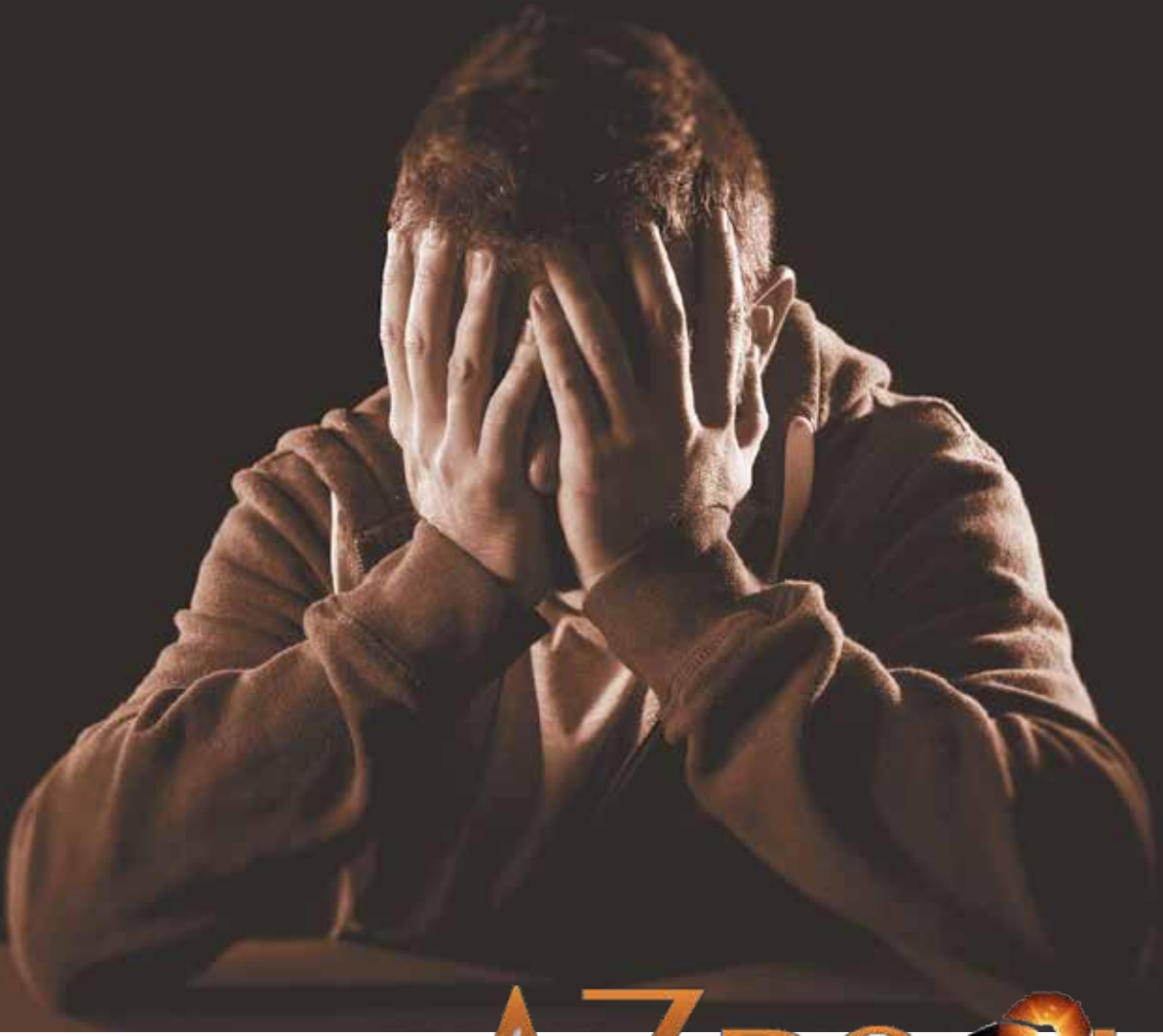


Branded for Life

and other stories from the registry



Educagtion
Advocacy
Support

The logo for AZRSOL features the letters 'AZRSOL' in a large, bold, orange font. The letter 'A' contains a white silhouette of a hand with fingers spread. The letter 'O' is replaced by a black sphere with a bright orange and yellow ring of light around its equator, resembling a planet or a sun. Below the letters, the text 'Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws' is written in a smaller, dark brown font.

Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws

...because
denying any
group of citizens
their civil,
constitutional,
or human rights
threatens the
essential liberties
of us all.



Broken Heart, Weary Body

Patricia B.

The day I left my home in New York to move to Arizona stands in my memory as one of the darkest days of my life. It was the beginning of an indescribably painful journey that continues to this day.

I came alone to support my son Stephen who had been charged with child molestation, naively believing his case would soon be resolved. After all, Stephen maintained his innocence, and our U.S. Constitution places the burden of proof with the government, guaranteeing a person charged with a crime to be innocent until proven guilty.

We soon learned this is not the case in Arizona when it comes to child molestation. Stephen was tasked with having to prove he had no sexual intent when he allegedly touched children on their private parts as he threw them into the pool.

We began with the intention of hiring the best lawyers we could find. (Fortunately we had the financial resources to do that. Most people in our son's position do not have the ability to stand up for themselves in court.) We took the case to trial, certain he would be found not guilty and the law under which he was charged would be deemed unconstitutional. We did this not only for our son, but for the thousands of people who are affected by unjust laws and practices that undermine U.S. citizens' constitutional right to remain innocent until proven guilty.

We were dumbfounded and devastated when Stephen was found guilty and handed a 75-year flat sentence. How can it be that someone is sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison for touching children over their clothing in public, with no sexual malice intended! We were and are outraged at this and so many similar stories we have heard, This can't possibly be in the best interest of public safety.

Of course we appealed, and have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in our efforts to stand up for the U.S. Constitution, which would reduce the incredible number of wrongful convictions that happen when people are deemed guilty until proven innocent.

Realizing this was going to be a long, uphill battle, my husband and I sold our dream home

on the Hudson River and moved into a small condo in Phoenix so we could support our son through this traumatic period of his life. This was the first of many excruciating decisions we have had to make over the years, and the losses we have endured haunt us still.

Even more unsettling than moving thousands of miles from our sons, grandson and extended family and giving up our home, our friends, and the life we had built in New York was the loss of our country. Over the last 14 years, our world has been turned upside down as we have witnessed firsthand the many ways in which our criminal legal system has been corrupted. We are committed to making sure any law that shifts the burden of proof from the prosecutor to the defendant is erased from the books.

Every Saturday and Sunday for ten years we made the long drive to visit Stephen in prison. There we met hundreds of families – many with children. We were shocked to discover these people did not fit our stereotypical image of criminals. They looked, acted, and spoke like normal people we see on the street.

Although it is against DOC policy for visitors to interact with each other, we came to know many of the families. The plight of so many children tugged at our hearts – I could give you hundreds of examples, but will limit it to two very precious, tender-hearted memories.

Grandparents who regularly brought their grandchildren to visit their father celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in the visitation room. I bought a little treat from the vending machine, stuck a spork in it for a candle, and left it on their table, as a small gesture to say, “We see you. We care. We are here for you.” It warmed my heart to see the family divide that little cake into pieces, as they raised their sodas to toast the event. We were appalled to learn that when this man was released from prison, he would no longer be allowed to have any contact with his children whatsoever until they turned 18, due to his terms of probation.

I met Peyton when she was an infant. Over the next two years this delightful little being raised the spirits of everyone in the visitation room. She and I shared a little game that still brings a smile to my lips today, so many years later. I would leave quarters in the vending machine slot for her to find. Each time she found one, she would squeal with delight and run back to her parents with it. It was quite a game I played with her; the COs never caught on. I often wonder how that sweet family is doing, and feel heaviness in my heart, knowing that at age two, when her dad got out of prison, Peyton lost communication with him, as he is no longer allowed to have contact with her.

The painful reality of so many children losing their parents when they are released from prison led us to found Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws (AZRSOL). Our intention

was to change the terms of probation for people on the Sex Offender Registry. The terms of probation often have the opposite effect of their intention: to keep the public and our children safe. In fact, many of them, and the Registry itself, ostracize and shame people, break families and communities apart, and make it difficult for a person to re-enter society after they have served their prison term – all of which put our children in harm's way.

In 2017, Stephen's conviction was overturned by the U.S. District Court. We are very happy to have him home, but we are not done yet.

The State of Arizona appealed. Recently the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the District Court decision overturning his conviction. However, they did not rule the law unconstitutional, as we had hoped. The possibility remains that he will be returned to prison to serve out the remainder of his death-in-prison sentence. We still live under the oppressive, disorienting cloud of uncertainty about Stephen's future. We continue to focus our time, energy and resources to prove our son's innocence and to uphold the stated values of our country.

This process has taken an enormous toll on the emotional, mental, physical and financial well-being of every member of our family. We are exhausted, disheartened and frightened. Some days I think I can't spend another minute engaged in the arduous, grueling work of educating the public, legislators, law enforcement, probation officers and therapists about the plight of children and families so deeply traumatized by the harshness of our attitudes towards "sex offenders." At those times, though, the voices of the children we met at visitation and those we meet today ring in my heart, "Please, for us, we need you to find the courage and stamina to persevere." And so I gather my broken heart, do some self-care to soothe my weary body, and take the next step. It is indeed a one-day-at-a-time process.

Many studies show the recidivism rate for people convicted of sexually-based offenses is very low (3-5%). It is time for an overhaul of laws regarding sexually-based offenses. We will continue to do everything we can to implement just, rational, constitutional laws and practices that support rehabilitation and reintegration of people who engage in or are accused of "criminal" behavior and that help families build strong, healthy, nurturing relationships. We are dedicated to working in concert with you to make sure that happens.



The Scarlet Letter Stands for Sex Offender

Robert and Kathy B

Two years ago our normal family life was turned upside down. My wife and I had successfully raised three children to adulthood. We were working on our youngest who was the academic star of the family. He was a couple of weeks away from graduating in the top tenth in his class with a full tuition scholarship to the University of Arizona.

Our son never had any problems with drugs or alcohol and was never a problem in school; the periodic calls from the principal's office were to tell us our son was getting an award or accolade for a science fair project. He reached the Eagle Scout accomplishment a couple of months earlier and we were extremely proud of his courtesy, honesty and integrity.

On my birthday a phone call came from the police department that our son had been arrested. My wife and I dropped everything and went down to the police office. It was explained that our son had a sexual encounter with an underage girl. We were told the girl met our son online and invited him over for a rendezvous at her house. She sent him videos and naked pictures of herself as enticements. Our naive son took the bait and drove to her house in the middle of the night. The teenagers kissed, hugged and got naked together when her father discovered the two. There was no sex and the encounter was consensual.

After hearing the story from the police officer, we were somewhat surprised at the fuss, considering the two kids mutually consented, no sex occurred and that they both seemed to have a role in this encounter. Frankly, we first thought this was a matter that could have been resolved with two sets of parents talking to each other. We had two daughters and could relate to the other parent's position. We had no idea how much trouble our son was in. We were just about to be sucked into a vortex.

It took us a day to get our son released. We knew the charges were sexual misconduct with a minor and sexual abuse, both serious felonies. We still did not realize how serious. We attempted to get our son back to school so he could finish out the semester and graduate, since there were 4 weeks left in the semester. We worked with the principal and Pretrial services to try to keep him in school. We thought we could keep this matter private and under the radar. Then we received a call from our son-in-law telling us the local news had run a half true story on our son; the cat was out of the bag. Our family was

devastated, at that point we knew our son would not be receiving his honors and getting to walk with his class.

It became apparent that we would need professional help. We decided to interview the top attorney for these types of cases based on a recommendation from another family who had gone through a similar matter. In the interview we learned how much trouble our son was in, and we were looking at potentially serious prison time of 25-30 years for the offenses charged. This was the beginning of our education. We were told the retainer would be \$75,000; that was the minimum fee. The attorney was interested in what would be the defense? We said how about the truth, he did not have sex with her and she lied about her age and what about her role in the incident? Then the attorney told us about how they recently lost a major case with a young man at a bar. The girl had been ID'd at the door and had a bracelet band showing she was 21. The two got together and had sex and the young man thought she was 21, not 16. We were informed that not knowing the age of the person was no defense. The young man went to prison and is a lifetime sex offender.

The attorney asked if the police had come to our house with a search warrant yet. We answered no; he prepared us for a probable raid, that we could expect them to come and rifle through all of our belongings looking for evidence. We became very scared and worried about what could be found on our router, modem and personal computers. He explained that any naked pictures she sent our son could have 10-year sentences for each picture she sent if he saved them. Luckily there were no pictures and the police never came in the middle of the night.

We settled on a attorney who seemed to really care about our case and our family. He explained about the grand jury process and that it was likely the county attorney would pursue this route, which sounded so extreme to us--a grand jury indictment. Thus began our crash education of the legal system. We assumed a reasonable plea deal would come quickly and our nightmare would end swiftly. This did not happen. The prosecutor would not offer a plea deal until our son had a thorough psychological exam and risk assessment. We agreed to get this completed, since we knew our son did not have a problem other than a lack of common sense. He was quickly growing up; he had no choice. We made an appointment for the risk assessment as quickly as we could and learned we were looking at 5 months to get the results.

We began to panic because our son's wonderful college scholarship was in jeopardy. Through several meetings with the judge an agreement was struck that he could commute to Tucson every day and go to school while the slow wheels of the legal system churned. Our son drove 300 miles a day and had to be back in Maricopa County by 10 pm every night. His schedule had to be compressed so he had no significant free time on campus. He had enough time to park, ride his bike, go to class and come straight home. We were hopeful he would meet some friends in school even though he was wearing a monitoring device on his ankle. Most of his friends scattered in the wind post high school graduation. Some were quick to judge based on hearsay, like his youth group who banned him from coming to meetings because of the charges presented. He lost his sole connection to the outside world when his pretrial representative talked to his work; he was quickly judged and put on permanent probation from working. We quickly witnessed our son's demeanor decline.

We struggled to keep positive and hopeful that everything would be ok. My wife and I constantly worried if our son would be alive when we got home; his grief was unfathomable. His world had been crushed in a moment of lapsed judgment. Kids experiment with sex; almost every high school kid in this state has broken the law. The only one trying to keep our son propped up was us. The system only saw him as a sexual deviant, not a stupid adolescent kid who made a giant mistake. It would have been enough of a lesson having dealt with the angry girl's father, spending a night in jail sleeping on his gym shoes, missing prom and graduation, and enduring public scrutiny. Staring at 31 years in jail seemed disproportionate to what happened. The system has a one-size-fits-all approach with no perspective of the big picture. This incident a generation before would have been considered a kid thing. We never considered what happened to be appropriate or something we would have condoned. Our concern was the reaction of the judicial system and society. We never considered having to caution our kids to be cautious of other kids trying to pass off as being older.

Finally, an offer of a plea came 6 months later. The main point of concern with our family at this point was the condition of sex offender registration. We told our lawyer this was the line in the sand for our family. If it was a condition, we would be forced to go to trial. A felony conviction would be bad enough, but sex offender status would destroy any chance of what was left of a normal life for our son. Thankfully the plea kept this condition off the table, although not permanently, just deferred. However his probation would have sex offender terms as a condition.

This last year on probation has been a difficult transition for our son. Getting a simple apartment is a bureaucratic nightmare, having to go to mandatory treatment while on

probation is a challenge. The worst part is our son received 20 years of probation for an offense that occurred when he was only 18 years old.

The most impactful issue daily for our family is the closeness and support of family values. Our son is very close to his siblings, but his older two siblings have children and he currently is not allowed to be around children. This effectively cuts off his relationship with his older siblings and destroys the relationship he has with his nieces and nephews. Holidays and family gatherings are now the most difficult times. Either our son is excluded, or our older children are.

There really is no need for this extreme measure; it is clearly detrimental to his well-being and the well-being of an entire family. This one-size-fits-all approach is detrimental to a young man just entering adulthood from the one thing that can help him move forward and be a successful productive member of our society, Family.



An Old-Guy Story of Re-Entry

Barney O.

In 2003 I was arrested and charged with two counts of child molestation, Class 2 felonies. I was offered a plea deal that would have resulted in prison and lifetime probation. I did not want probation and the ACA refused to negotiate any other plea deal. I went to trial, was found (rightfully) guilty and sentenced to two 15-year terms (flat time) to run concurrently. I was 60 at the time and it was my first criminal conviction.

I have learned that sentences are often disproportional to the offense committed. People who commit murder often receive shorter sentences than those convicted of a sexually-based crime. A friend of mine got 200 years for pictures, a death-in-prison term. It is disheartening to see someone who sells drugs to a child that results in the death of that child get the same 15 years I got, as well as only having to serve 85% of his time, while I had to serve every second of my sentence. He also does not have to be on a public registry, labeled as a dangerous criminal for the rest of his life.

Once I got to prison, I realized it is designed to make inmates fail, reoffend and return. Human beings are being warehoused in these institutions, many of which are run by private, for-profit businesses. That experience is a story for another time.

Long-term incarceration so institutionalizes the inmate that life after release is extremely difficult for most. Yet there is virtually no support to help someone re-enter. I was released on December 26, 2018 with 26 months of parole and have been fortunate to have a great Parole Officer. I also have the advantage of being old and having monetary and other assets. I really feel sorry for the youngsters. For me, the effects of institutionalism were minimal because of my autism and the fact that I had spent many years in the military. Most are not so lucky, and are affected more than me.

Housing: One of the biggest issues for anyone with a felony record, and even more difficult for people with an SO label. Many places that will accept felons will not accept anyone with an SO conviction. Again, I was fortunate to have money, which most people just being released do not. I lived in a motel that was satisfactory and I felt safe there. The owner had a daughter. Families lived there and in the adjacent motel. At ~\$42/night (\$1260/month), not cheap, but the proprietor gave me a break for paying in advance and being a Vet. Never any problems. The owner says he likes SOs because they pay and keep to themselves. I bought a condo in March and moved out.

Employment: Although I am well-qualified for many jobs and pose no threat to society, I have had problems obtaining a job. I am fortunate to have retirements, but I know people who go back to prison because they cannot find work.

Transportation: The motel I lived in for the first 3 months had no stores close by, so I lived in a “food desert.” I did a lot of walking at the beginning. I was lucky to have friends to help me with transportation and I learned the bus and trolley system quickly. Because I had money from retirement, I was able to buy a car three weeks after my release. Most people do not have the money to do that.

Companionship: I avoid social events, fearing I might meet someone I like and have to tell them I am an SO. When I do participate in a social activity, I wear a “Desert Storm Vet” hat. That helps guide the conversation in a direction that feels safe to me. I have been lonely with no female company, but I cope.

Church: No Catholic Church will accept me without Draconian conditions, but Praise and Worship Center in Chandler has welcomed me.

I ask legislators to work to change the Draconian laws we have in place that make it very difficult for a person to successfully re-enter society once they have served their prison sentence.



Living in the Shadows

Anonymous

I live in the shadows of life. I used to be a very outgoing person and enjoyed meeting people, but now I shy away from all of that. Why? My son committed a sex offense when he was 18 years old, and because society views him as a monster, I do not want to share his story. It is easier for me to stay in the background.

Sex offenders are reputed to be the worst of the worst people who have no chance of recovering. In reality, they have a very low recidivism rate of around 3-5%, but in my experience those statistics don't seem to change the image conjured up in the minds of most people when they hear the words "sex offender."

I don't want my co-workers to know about him as I don't know how they will take it, and I have heard of people losing their jobs when it is discovered that a loved one has committed a sex crime and is on the Registry.

For safety reasons, my son has chosen to serve his sentence at a federal prison in another state, so we don't get to visit him very often. And if that is not hard enough, I know that when he is released his life will be even more difficult. The punishment never ends for someone on the Registry, and he will have a hard time finding housing, employment, etc. due to the numerous and ever-changing restrictions imposed on registered citizens. I will worry because his address, name and picture will be posted on the world-wide internet, and he could be subject to retaliation and abuse.

I love my son, and he is so much more than what he did. He has the biggest smile and heart, and never gave us any trouble growing up. He was in college studying Criminal Justice and participated in the ROTC program in both high school and college. Yet because he will forever be defined by the worst few moments of his life, I know his life will not be anything like he had hoped.

My heart aches for him. I am on anti-depressants and high blood pressure medication because of the despair and hopelessness I feel. My biggest prayer is that in his lifetime the Registry will go away, so we, and others in situations similar to ours, can live a more normal life and have some hope for the future.



Tip of the Iceberg

Harry and Gayle C.

Our son, Harry Alan Cordova IV, was following in the footsteps of a long line of family members who have contributed to society and community through service in the military and/or work as a civil servant. A former Arizona Wildland Hotshot Firefighter and EMT/Medic, he lost 19 of his comrades in the tragic incident involving the Granite Mountain Hotshots in 2013. After that loss, he left the Hotshots and completed the Phoenix Fire Department's Training Academy. But before he could get hired on with the Fire Department, he took a single misstep that has had a cost of such magnitude it cannot be quantified in dollars or words.

In February 2017 Harry was arrested and released on bail for possession of child porn. The "crime" was just the tip of the iceberg. This brought to the surface a childhood incident of molestation, unknown to us or anyone else until the time of his arrest, when he revealed it to arresting officers. He explained that, because of the incident he had suffered as a child, he was compiling IP addresses of child porn sites. He planned to submit them to the proper authorities, in an effort to lead authorities upstream to the picture takers. He did not realize that visiting these sites in his research efforts would result in a charge of "intent to commit a felonious activity." His non-criminal intent was further reinforced by the fact that such sites were so easily available through Google online.

His explanation fell on deaf ears. The Maricopa County Attorney's office prosecuted him to the maximum degree. Thus began the most awful, heartbreaking journey of having to confront the fact that our son would spend years in prison, and the rest of his life on probation and on the Sex Offender Registry. That realization hit us all like a ton of bricks.

Ironic that even "murder" has degrees in the Statutes but not so with sex offender cases!

Harry had no criminal record, no criminal intent, no child abuse, no molestation, no kidnapping or imprisonment, no indecent exposure, no public sexual indecency, no sexual abuse or assault, no violence, no voyeurism, no child sex trafficking, no taking a child for the purpose of prostitution, no picture taking of children, no luring of a minor for sexual exploitation.

His lawyer (whom we depleted our savings to pay for) advised him to take the plea deal offered – ten years to be served at 85%, with lifetime probation upon release. Going to

trial would have led to even more severe and harsh consequences; he was looking at a 100-year prison term. Taking a plea meant no opportunity to present mitigating facts and circumstances, no particulars of his given case allowed in a trial, no judicial rulings on the facts and merit of the case. No Prison Diversion options, no short-term probation, no classes or counseling, i.e., no opportunity to look below the surface where 80+% of the facts and mitigating circumstances lay, just as most of the iceberg lies beneath the surface of the ocean.

Given the stigma of such charges, almost all his friends, many since childhood, began distancing themselves, further isolating him.

His wife divorced him, so he was now engaged in a second legal battle, this one to gain visitation with his then two-year-old son. Since there was no prior criminal history, no hands on, etc. he was granted limited visitation rights. Limitations on visiting his son pained him in immeasurable ways. Since May 2018 the mother of his son no longer allows any of us to see young Harry.

Our son has since had another son, Ivan, with another woman ... a long-time friend and former girlfriend. They go with us about twice a month to visit Harry. But heartbreakingly, when he is released from prison and is on probation, he will no longer be allowed to have any contact with either of his children, who will be 9 and 12 years old.

Right now, there is outrage among U.S. citizens regarding separating immigrant children from their parents. That is indeed among the cruelest form of government-sanctioned child abuse. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. Millions of American children are being legally separated from their parents due to incarceration and the terms of sex offender probation. According to the National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers University,* minor children being separated from their parents as a result of incarceration is a reality for over 10 million children, a disproportionately high percentage of whom are Black or Hispanic. (These figures do not account for the millions of children who are separated from their parents due to terms of sex offender probation, which does not allow parents to have any contact at all with their children until they turn 18 years old.)

“Parental incarceration is now recognized as an ‘adverse childhood experience’ (ACE); it is distinguished from other ACEs by the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma.”*

In the case of sex offenders it is argued that we are separating the children in an effort to keep them safe from parents who have harmed or might harm them. However, given the low rates of recidivism (3-5%) among sex offenders, this argument does not hold water. It makes sense (and there are numerous studies to back this up) that people who experience shame, isolation, traumatization, and shunning are more likely to commit crimes than are those who have a strong network of supportive, loving family and friends.

We question how tearing apart families and separating children from their parents, especially when there is little to no threat to society nor prior criminal history, serves anyone. A single mis-step should be a learning experience in life - not an experience that robs life and time, with disastrous effects on families not readily seen as they are below the surface. Wouldn't it be better for everyone if instead of wasting our precious resources on criminalizing and incarcerating people, we invested in Prison Diversion practices that work to bring families and communities together in healthy ways? What kind of world might we have then?

We ask you to support any changes in the laws that will help keep our children safer and create a more just, humane, and fair system of justice for everyone.

* Children and Families of the Incarcerated Fact Sheet, National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated, Rutgers University, Camden. Retrieved 7/09/19 from <https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/nrccfi-fact-sheet-2014.pdf>



Thirty Plus Years on the Registry

John B

My name is John Bowman, date of birth November 1, 1967. My offense date is April 28, 1986. My date of conviction and sentencing was May 11, 1987 on a non-dangerous, non-repetitive Class 5 & Class 6 felony offense for sexual abuse and sexual conduct with a minor. I was 18 on the offense date and the victim was 16. I served a total of 1 year and 3 months in the ADOC for both of the offenses and was released on parole in August 1988.

Since August 1988 I have been registering as a sex offender in the State of Arizona. Sex offender registration has had a very negative impact on my life and the life of my entire family. Being a registered sex offender has put my life and my family's life in great danger. I have been turned down for jobs with big name businesses due to being a registered sex offender. I have been turned down by rental agents at apartment complexes in Tempe & Mesa due to being a registered S.O. I have had people follow me who received flyers in their mail box on me over the S.O. Registration / notification and tell me to move or they would shoot me, which has put my life and the life of my family in a great amount of danger, especially because I have had to live at home with my mother for most of the 30 plus years that I have been a registered S.O.

Please note that being labeled as a registered sex offender is both very embarrassing and shameful to me and it has caused me to suffer with depression & humiliation on and off for the last 30 plus years of my life. Every year I have to go to my local M.V.D. office and pay a fee to renew / update my driver's license, which is just one of many embarrassing situations for me because the people at M.V.D. know I am a registered S.O. when they pull up my information on the computer. In most cases when I have had to show my Arizona drivers license for any reason people will ask me why I have a one year drivers license.

I would like it to be noted that in February 2000 I went through the State of Arizona sex offender evaluation process with a mental health care official from the State of Arizona and was cleared that I DO NOT meet the criteria as a sexually violent person; yet I'm still being made to register as a sex offender. Please also note that the 1986 offense is the only sex offense I've ever had until 2016 when I was charged with failure to update address information by the Pinal County Sheriff's Department, which is a victimless crime. This is just a short version of the things I've gone through and dealt with in the 30 plus years I've had to register as a sex offender in Arizona. I think after 30 years of not committing another sex offense, I SHOULD NOT HAVE TO REGISTER ANY MORE.



Robbed!

Kenny

My name is Kenny and I have been robbed. This state robbed me of my house, my business, my Harley, my truck and most importantly my family! I have owned two companies and also traveled around the world building the world's largest aquariums. Together my team and I broke six world records in the acrylic industry. I have never had any trouble in any other state or country I have ever been to.

When I came home from overseas I was happy not to have to travel anymore. My wife and kids were so happy. My father is very ill, I was helping him daily through his struggles. My mother was also happy I came home. Now they all regret that I ever came back to my own home town! My children are sad and cry for me to be with them. My wife struggles so hard to pay bills which she "cannot pay" and cries daily for me to come home. My father who used to save lives at Boswell Memorial hospital, but is now disabled also cries and tells me, "I wish you were here to help me." How is this possible? What happened to my rights? Now with a suicidal wife, a dying father and good children who are scarred for life, what can I do? The only reason I do not commit suicide myself is because I do not want to add to my family's misery!

I was arrested for sex crimes I did not commit. My wife of 19 years and my three children were homeless for 3.5 months. This state has made sure that I remain incarcerated until trial. I have no bond. How is this legal? This state has gone out of its way to split apart my family and my business. I was a taxpayer, a voter and an employer. I have no priors and no reason to run. Why can I not be out on pretrial services paying taxes and supporting my family? I am a loving family man that believes in God. This just proves to me and my family that being honest, working hard to make an honest living and voting means nothing. They say. Why should I care, the "system" is perverted and there is no reason to vote or to contribute to a crooked unjust political scheme.

How is it that I am facing 124 years, not life? This sentence is not humanly possible. When I asked the judge this, she just looked at me and said "no, it's not possible." I was offered a plea of 17-24 years and the state does not even have all of my "discovery" yet! How is this ok?

Even if I did every crime that is charged against me, in most other states I would have an "F-3" and the maximum sentence would be 5 to 7 years. I know someone that brutally murdered two people with a knife with uncountable stab wounds and more than 5

priors including drug trafficking and violent robberies, and he got 17 years. On one of my court dates my family waited through another man's trial. They said this man violated a restraining order and premeditated attempted murder. He got 60 days county and 10 years probation. Here in Lower Buckeye Jail I have seen many people with non violent sex crimes who have no priors, who can easily do probation, getting very high pleas. How do I cope with this? What do I tell my children? What do I tell my wife? My parents?

Since I have been in this jail I have been unhealthy, depressed and borderline suicidal. We get fed once every 12 hours. It consists of bread, beans, rice, potatoes, & soy slop. All of this breaks down to sugar in our bodies. I have already had a friend in here die from lack of healthcare. I have never been so unhealthy in my life. I am reaching out with all of my heart to anyone that can help change this system. Please, help us!



Trauma and Redemption

Maya J.

“Gramaya, the Earth makes the best water!” My grandson, Lukas, spoke these words as he drank from his water bottle on one of our frequent outings. I have many precious memories of our time together during his first eight years. We were very close; I took care of him about 30 hours a week from the age of three until six.

I was stunned when his mother sent an email saying I was no longer allowed to see him without supervision. I fought that through the courts and was granted limited visitation rights. However, his mother soon moved to Michigan, making it difficult for us to communicate or visit. Lukas is now 16. I have not seen or talked to him for eight years.

Losing contact with Lukas has been one of the most painful consequences of my son, Ryan’s, incarceration. He is serving a 16-year sentence and two lifetime probations for touching his daughter’s (from a different mother) vagina and breast twice. I am blamed for his actions by all three mothers of my grandchildren. I have not been allowed to interact with my granddaughter, who is now 21. And last month, my younger son, Mark’s, wife insisted on including a clause in their divorce agreement stating I will not be left alone with their children for longer than eight hours, and never overnight.)

That these women hold such disdain for me and the fact that one of my sons is in prison for child molestation could lead one to believe I am creepy and irresponsible.

I definitely made a lot of mistakes as a mother. I was married to a man who was sexually, emotionally and physically abusive. What possessed me to have children with him? A question I often reflect upon. As a result of the chaos of living in a severely abusive home, my sons were neglected and traumatized throughout their childhoods, even after our final separation, which took place when they were 5 and 11 years old. I take responsibility for that.

Recently I have been studying the effects of intergenerational trauma, which gets passed down through generations, exacerbated over time. My sons are a product of this. Sexual, emotional and physical abuse has plagued our family as far back as I am able to trace.

Mark is working to heal his childhood wounds. However, Ryan is not being given an equal chance to deal with *his* demons. Instead, his trauma has been intensified. He is currently

being warehoused in a private, for-profit prison. In 2015 Arizona spent approximately \$25,000 a year to incarcerate someone, and a mere \$3600 to educate a child, many of whom live in unstable, abusive conditions. What kind of world could we build if we, as a society, committed to investing in our children and families, helping build healthy relationships and stopping the cycle of abuse? We would create a much healthier social climate than the one we have now, which grows out of a system that promotes and shields companies who profit from the misery of people, fanning the fires of abusive behavior!

When someone causes harm to another, doesn't it make sense to address their mental / emotional health issues rather than stigmatizing and dehumanizing them through long-term incarceration, lifetime probation and the Sex Offender Registry? Our family has been severely traumatized by this one incident, which if handled differently, could have been an opportunity to end our intergenerational trauma.

I am perturbed by our pointing fingers at individuals who do something hurtful instead of looking at the systemic dysfunction that underlies sexual abuse. How is it that our world leaders commit crimes on a much grander scale than anyone I have ever met who is being punished for life, yet they are allowed to exempt themselves from criminal prosecution? I am livid about this disparity and troubled by our unwillingness to address the foundational issues of sexual offending.

Throughout human history women have been objectified and sexualized. The billboard I passed every time I visited Ryan in jail demonstrates the extent to which we have normalized objectification of women: a picture of three beautiful young women, dressed in tight, revealing clothing, each holding a can of beer. The tagline: *Sin ti no hay fiesta!* (Without this there is no party!). It is no mystery to me that we have such a problem with sexual abuse and addiction!

My agonizing marriage and lack of ability to effectively parent catapulted me into a journey that grew me into the person I am today – a woman who is wiser due to the arduous struggle of climbing out of the depths of despair. I *know* people can change. Having emotional, financial and spiritual support facilitates making those changes. I have spent thousands of dollars on therapy, educational workshops, and spiritual teachers, along with countless hours working on myself. My current state of emotional well-being is a testament to the work I have done.

People who hurt other people *are* redeemable. I adamantly oppose all practices that castigate anyone who harms another (practices which, interestingly, do not seem to apply to wealthy white men in power). Collateral consequences to those who commit sex offences and their families exacerbate the very factors known to increase risk of

recidivism. If we truly want to create a society in which children grow up feeling safe, nurtured, and cared for, we have to courageously address the sexual dysfunction of our society and treat sexual abuse as the mental health, intergenerational trauma and systemic issue it is, rather than as a criminal offense.

We could start by retracting harmful, unjust criminal laws currently on the books and replacing them with restorative, inclusive healing practices such as Van Jones' Redemption Project and other revolutionary work being done in the criminal justice, mental health and family therapy fields. This will require a major shift in the perception of lawmakers, therapists and the public, and every one of us will have to find the courage to confront our own culpability in the perpetuation of sexual and childhood abuse.

One of my favorite (and last) memories of Lukas is of the storytelling concert he and I hosted to raise money for an enclosure for Hunter, a bobcat we met at an animal rescue facility. His insistence on helping Hunter move from his cage to a beautiful enclosure was due, I believe, to the pain he was feeling over the recent loss of his dad, who was similarly locked in a small cage.

Last year Lukas experienced further loss of his relationship with his dad when his mother was removed from Ryan's visitation list by ADC for reasons unknown to us. She has to be on Ryan's visitation list in order for Lukas to talk to him, so they have not had a phone conversation for over a year.

My heart breaks when I imagine what my grandchildren are going through. They could benefit from the wisdom I have gained through the personal work I have done over the last 45 years. That I do not have the opportunity to contribute to their lives distresses me greatly.

Thank you for the work you do to stop the traumatization of our young people. Please consider sponsoring a groundbreaking bill in this next legislative session – one that automatically and retroactively removes all people from the Sex Offender Registry who committed their offense when they were under the age of 26 and expunges their records. What a contribution you would make to our youth!



Homecoming

Nancy P.

I'm Nancy Phillips and I want to share my feelings about this whole legal process we've gone through in the eight months our son has been home and on lifetime probation.

While our son was incarcerated for 8½ years, his absence in our daily lives was hard to endure. The financial burden to our whole family was immense. Somehow, with God's help and everyone else's we made it through that nightmare. We anticipated the homecoming. THE WONDERFUL HOMECOMING! Reuniting with everyday things and family all together sitting at the family table, enjoying a home-cooked meal and each other and finally being a family again. He told his kids and family, "We will get to do so much when I get home and we will make up for lost time."

... Oh but wait ...

Camping – fishing – lakes – parks – picnics – hiking – movies – bowling – ball games – malls.

... Oh NO ...

We can't.

And his seventeen- and sixteen-year-old-children cannot attend family events. He cannot see them. He cannot talk to them. He cannot send cards or letters. No communication at all, even though for over eight years he saw them all the time at visits and they talked almost daily so he could be sure to remain close and in their lives.

... But oh NO ...

Not till they are eighteen.

... The crushed heart starts again ...

He must move forward. He gets work immediately. He gets a great job, he loves his boss and his coworkers are great. Now he prays they will understand all his restrictions. Leaving early once a week for classes – coming in late once a month for PO visits – Not

taking customers with children – Not being able to use the internet or have a smart phone to interact with customers. Oh and that's after they have to install Net Nanny on the computer he uses at work. These things cost him sales which means lost money.

... Oh but wait ...

Money:

Classes	\$45 a week / \$180-225 a month
PO	\$65 a month
ABLE Test	\$200
MSI Test	\$225
Lie Detector	\$250 (BTW, he passed this test, proving what he said all along was the truth)

Note: He will be required to take all these tests again, not sure how often or how many times.

Probation rules make it very hard for a person to even hold a job. It seems they like to make it harder for those who are succeeding and have acclimated to the outside world again. WHY? How is that helping the person and his family?

... Oh and don't forget to REGISTER.

BTW, no charge for this!



Looking for Zebras

Raj P.

In my years as a student before becoming a physician 6 years ago, my classmates and I had some uniquely high expectations, ready to shake up the world. I would examine a patient with a simple cough but would peer down their throat hoping to catch a rare tumor sticking out...just like in our textbook. I would examine someone with a little headache...but secretly hope to diagnose that exotic brain-eating parasite I saw on the news.

I would then realize myself how unusual this was, my profession existed only to ensure others' health. But I couldn't help but wonder, could I get an award! Make it on TV! Get a new disease named after me!

But, No. Our superiors luckily would warn us against looking for what was called "zebras", which referred to the unlikely rare cases impressive only in theory: in a textbook, a written test, or in a prime-time TV drama. We were warned: if you hear hoofbeats outside, stop dreaming of seeing a Zebra...it's probably just a Horse!

Now I realize we weren't the only ones afflicted with this urge to make a splash. In the justice system, whether a judge, a journalist, a legislator, or a prospective employer, everyone naturally imagines "Zebra". Commonly many jump on labels like "Criminal" or "Predator", which I will admit make a great headline.

All I hope for is consideration by all, for those who made a poor choice in the past, to get a second chance to be able move on. Contrary to popular belief, I am not asking for a pardon, a pass, or any benefits, and definitely not guaranteed forgiveness.

Do I blame the media? No. Do I blame current legislators? No. Do I blame law enforcement? No. I would be looking for that "Zebra" if I was them.

But unfortunately, I find myself today on the other side, sentenced several years ago to probation, already successfully completed...but tacked on "the Registry" for life because a prosecutor checked an extra box. I walk daily amongst the privileged, dress well, nice car, you would never know. Unless of course you're one of thousands of neighbors living near me who have received my framed mugshot in a Community Safety Notification in the mail from the local police.

Today I sit here writing this without the right job, without the ability to rent my own apartment, without a basis to ask the right girl to marry me. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined how much individuals are hurt, and how much their families, employers and all of society end up as collateral damage.



Choices

Paul Hanley, author of Roller Coaster to Hell and Back: A True Story of Sexual Abuse and New Hope. For a full list of Paul's publications or to contact the author, visit pauldhanley.com

My name is Paul Hanley. I'm a 56-year-old survivor of sexual abuse that started in 1973, when I was ten years old, and went on for ten long years. I know from having done to me basically everything sexual a man can do to a boy, that sexual abuse is a viscerally disgusting soul crime. And like many survivors, I blamed myself for what was done to me.

I know firsthand that society makes it as hard as possible to speak openly about sexual abuse. When I wasn't being told by people I took the risk of confiding in that, "We don't talk about such things," I was being told, "Real men don't let themselves get sexually abused, so if it happened, you must have wanted it." The shaming wouldn't let up.

By 1993, the trauma of being sexually abused and my inability to resolve my shame had impacted me so deeply that I was out of touch with reality. I took off driving at random, ending up in Payson, Utah, which in my deluded state I mistook for Payson, Arizona, where I resided. There I took off all my clothes and attempted to rape an adult stranger in a motel pool, without any attempt to cover up what I was doing. I had the delusion that the woman was a famous country music singer who I believed was my girlfriend.

Fortunately for both of us, the woman kicked me in the groin before I could get myself in worse trouble and traumatize her further. The shock "sobered" me up a little and I put my clothes back on. At the suggestion of the desk clerk, I waited in the lobby for the police. I promptly confessed to them, as coherently as my confused state allowed.

After I pleaded guilty to "Attempted Forcible Sexual Abuse, a 3rd-degree Felony," I was put on probation and interstate compacted back to Arizona. That's when the shaming really started. Even the "expert" therapists told me I could not be cured of my sexual deviancy. I registered with law enforcement and have lived on the registry ever since, with no legal way of ever getting off it.

Being on the registry has made it extremely difficult to find jobs, housing, stability, and moral support. I've been threatened and harassed. And because my address is now public, not a day goes by that I don't worry about the safety of my family.

I successfully completed each and every term of my probation, including therapy by the

“experts” who were piling on me the very shame I had acted out on the poor woman I attacked. My probation was terminated in 1999. In 2004 I hired a Utah attorney to motion that my conviction be amended to a misdemeanor. The state joined in my motion and it was granted.

Yet I still have no way off the registry in Arizona.

Contrary to what the “experts” will tell you about me being incurable, even in the depths of my psychosis in 1993 I made a choice to attack that poor woman—and that means my choice not to commit more crimes is as good as a cure.

In the 25 years since I committed my crime, I haven't gotten so much as a speeding ticket. The Arizona Department of Corrections even let me go into one of our state prisons to talk to inmates about how to succeed with a sexually-based offense on your record.

My life's mission now is preventing and healing sexual abuse. To fight abuse, in 2017 I published my memoir “Roller Coaster to Hell and Back: A True Story of Sexual Abuse and New Hope.” In the book, I describe my recovery from the sexual abuse I suffered as a child, and my rehabilitation after my crime.

My childhood dream was a career in writing. Now that I've worked through most of my shame, I work for myself as an author and an editor who helps people on all sides of sexual abuse write and publish their stories.

I'm obviously no hero, but I've done my share to give back. From 2011 to 2016, I volunteered at a literacy center helping adult immigrants learn English and pass the US citizenship test. I told the literacy center about my crime right up front. They respected that.

I also helped my community by teaching free tai chi classes to senior citizens for five years.

Before I committed my offense, I somehow kept sane enough to serve twelve years in the Arizona Army National Guard. I earned several letters of commendation and received an honorable discharge. Learning in the Army to take responsibility for my actions has helped me succeed to a certain degree in spite of the registry. For example, I never used my childhood abuse as an excuse for my crime, even though my childhood set me up to fail.

Men who commit sex offenses are much more likely to have been sexually abused themselves than the general population. I hope my work will help these “invisible survivors,” as I call us. I want to prevent abuse, not just heal it after the fact. Most survivors of abuse, however, would never dream of harming someone the way they were harmed. So it’s important to me not to play the victim. It’s just that I do feel victimized by lifetime registry laws which mark me forever as a second-class citizen on the basis of one wrong choice.

I think it’s worth asking yourself whether the predictable effects of living on the registry, which often include being homeless, jobless, resentful, unstable, and lacking social support, really make people who have committed sex offenses less likely to commit more crime.



Forbidden Relationships

Richard P.

After 4 months in the 4th Ave Jail, only being able to speak to our son through a video screen with his children wondering why they can't be with their Daddy, he was taken to Tucson. So we then drove twice a week from Phoenix for one year and one day. We could not afford to help his wife and kids, so she married an old boyfriend with money and moved to San Diego. Then he was transferred to Florence. The kids wanted to see their Dad, so I drove to San Diego and had them stay with us most weekends and then had to take them back. This went on for 8½ years. They loved him so much!

Renting a car on weekends cost a lot of money and gas. Add to that the cost at Prison vending machines (\$2 for a soda, \$4.50 for a dried-out sandwich and \$2 or \$3 for some chips for 5 people every Saturday and Sunday. Some guards treated us like inmates. We left home at 3am to sit in line outside the prison until 8am, then stood in line till 8:30 in the heat or cold before entering. Incomplete games for the kids to play was a real drag for them. After the visit, we drove them back to San Diego until next weekend, when we started the whole process over again.

Now the kids are teenagers, Dad is out of Prison and forbidden to see or talk to them! His son is now 18 but his daughter is still 10 months from turning 18. She is heartbroken, her brother can see him but not her! Since his release it is still like Prison for all of us. He has been on Probation 8½ months.

He still somehow has a great attitude. He has done everything asked of him. He is a level one and has a great job selling RVs and no chance of doing anything that would make him return to Prison. He only wants to move forward, not keep having to relive the past. Everyone wants money, but they set him up to fail by not letting him have a cell phone or computer or being able to talk to customers with children. He has to live with us in Sun City and still has time to be a very good citizen if given the chance.

All offenders are not the same!!!!



Where is Man's Humanity Towards

Kally F.

Ninety years in prison plus lifetime probation was the sentence for possession only of computer images. Mandatory sentencing laws overruled a judge's reasoning that probation would have been sufficient. This was the result of exercising one's right to a trial rather than taking the offered plea bargains. This was the result of trusting a tech service to build and maintain a computer used in a business where discs were shared and often reformatted for future use as well as the machine being available and used by others. Why would one take the computer to a tech service if one knew there were images on it? And how would one know about there being deleted images on reformatted discs that came from various sources or were found in the office?

Being an incarcerated family member is a numbed stressfulness. There is the feeling of shame and embarrassment of a spouse's incarceration. There is the sense of injustice, unfairness toward the criminal justice system as one experiencing a trial with its publicity. There is coping with the frustration of an indifferent prison system as one faces constant changes in unit visitation and sees one's spouse deteriorate under DOC supervision. There is the loneliness of selling a family home of thirty some years during the first year of incarceration to be closer to a child's home and a spouse's prison. There is the emptiness of a relationship maintained through limited weekly visits, taped phone calls up to fifteen minutes, and letters – more of them sent to than received from prison.

There is the self-imposed restriction as one spends several thousand dollars to maintain the needs of the incarcerated spouse as well as self on an income that has had no cost-of-living increase in many years.

There is a sense of hopelessness as one prepares for two clemency board hearings only to have the two unanimous decisions for sentence reduction be denied by two governors. There is a sense of anger at the legislation of lumping together all degrees of sexual offenses whether they are actual, perceived or contrived. The anger continues as one realizes that trials result in 99% for conviction and hung jury decisions are often retried, resulting in many taking a plea bargain leading to crowded prison conditions. There is anger at the extreme restrictions placed upon released SOs and families. It is going from one prison to another because of the public fear of a label; drunk drivers, drug dealers, and murderers face less public scrutiny upon release.

The state needs to reevaluate its harsh punitive criminal justice system; this reevaluation should be done with open mindedness and fair logic, not with self-righteous pontification and judgmental opinions. People should not be warehoused with a system making profit off others' miseries; actual criminal actions should be corrected through rehabilitation efforts, not with demeaning imprisonment and indifferent releasing. Where is man's humanity towards man?



Juveniles on the Registry

Ryan B

When I was 17 I met a 14-year-old girl at a mutual friend's birthday party. We began talking and hanging out as friends. It wasn't long before I'd asked her to be my girlfriend. We were dating for about 4 months before I turned 18. I know that's not very long at all but within those 4 months I was convinced I was in love with this girl.

I'm now 21 years old, and because of decisions I made at 17 and 18 years old I will be on the registry for the rest of my life with no way of ever being able to clear my name from it. I will be a felon for the rest of my life as well. The charge I was given was sexual conduct with a minor 14 years or younger which is a Class 2 DCAC felony and comes with the same minimum, maximum and presumptive sentence when punishable under ARS 13-705 as any person over 18 that attempted to murder their victim in the first degree.

Whereas if she had been 15 prior to me turning 18 under Section 13-405 I would have been charged with a Class 6 felony. There was 7 months between me turning 18 and her turning 15 which basically means that had things happened 7 months after I had turned 18 I would have been charged with significantly less of an offense.

Finding jobs or careers that do not involve fast food, working at a restaurant, doing construction, or working at a factory or warehouse is seemingly impossible. Even after I've successfully completed my probation, I can never really have a normal life again. I will forever have the stigma of Sex Offender attached to my name as reminder of my past.

The feeling I get in my stomach when I think about living the rest of my life this way is crippling. To think that anywhere I go, whether it's somewhere else within the state of Arizona or going to a different state entirely, I will have to register and have the potential of having flyers sent out to my neighbors. All I pray for all day, every night, and every morning that I wake up is that one day I'll wake up with a fresh start.



Lifetime in Prison on Paper

Sue B.

In 1984, my son John was arrested for sexual assault with a minor. He had had consensual sex with a girl who told him she was 16; she was actually two weeks shy of 16. The Mesa Detective told us he did not have enough evidence to charge John. A year later, after he had turned 18, two deputies showed up at our home and arrested him. Seems the father of the girl had waited until John was an adult before pursuing the matter further. He was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison and two years probation. He served 15 months of his sentence. Three months after his release he was told he was required to register on the Sex Offender Registry.

When someone is sentenced to prison, probation, and a lifetime on the registry, the entire family goes with him. This Lifetime in Prison on Paper has been demeaning for John and for me. For instance, after he was put on the registry, many of my friends shied away from me. They never asked for the whole story; they just assumed the worst.

The list of things he can't do and places he can't go is long, all having to do with restrictions saying he cannot be anywhere children congregate: We can no longer have family gatherings at my home, we can't hold family picnics for a birthday, we can't go to the park. None of our family considers him to be dangerous. He spent time with his niece when she was a child; she has no concern about her daughter being around him, but that does not change the rules that have been arbitrarily put in place.

One of the many ways my life has been affected is demonstrated by our problems finding housing. For example: While John was in prison, I rented a one-bedroom apartment in Mesa. Three months before his release, I let the apartment manager know my son was coming home and we would need a two-bedroom apartment. The manager informed me that the rules state they cannot rent to "sex offenders." I had thirty days in which to find a new apartment and move. This was no easy task. Most apartment complexes and neighborhoods with HOAs will not rent to "sex offenders." Finally I found someone who owned a duplex and was willing to rent to us.

Over the years we have been turned away from numerous rental properties. Finally, in 1999, I bought my own home in Phoenix, so I no longer need permission for John to live with me. After I bought my house, flyers were sent out letting the neighbors know a sex offender had moved into the neighborhood. Some neighbors would drive by and shout

things like, "You're not welcome in our neighborhood!" Some will not speak to me. Although they haven't made direct threats to us, I always feel uncomfortable, knowing of their dislike of us and that they can cause us harm if they so choose.

Because of the prejudice against people on the registry, John has had trouble finding and keeping jobs, so he has been dependent on me for most of his adult life, including having to live with me. I am concerned about what will happen to him when I die, as I am his only source of support.

In 2016, he was charged with a technical probation and registration violation: failure to register as a sex offender in Pinal County. He was sent back to prison for 5.5 years (after being out for almost 30 years crime free.) So now, at age 74 I am back to visiting my son in prison, which is quite a hardship on me, both physically and financially.

We both feel victimized by the system that is in place. This is not justice. No juvenile should ever be put on the registry in the first place. John has never been a threat to society or to children; he has never been charged with another S/O crime. Yet he has been treated like a pariah his entire adult life, and by association, so have I. John's incarceration has cost Arizona taxpayers thousands of dollars, and for what? It has not made the public more safe. His case should be re-evaluated, as should others who have similar circumstances; after 33 years of being on it, surely he could safely be removed. It is time for these cruel, unjust, harmful laws to change.



Neverending Punishment

Vicky C.

Like most Americans, I always believed our justice system was mostly fair and just. I believed our due process worked and that, for the most part, the people in our prisons were there for good reason.

But 10 years ago I learned the truth. When my son, Dustin, was a senior in college, he became involved with a young high-school girl. She was the sister of a friend, and over time they became close. When her family discovered they had been intimate, we were thrust into the criminal punishment system with all the force of the state.

Even though they'd only had sex once, and despite the fact that it was consensual, and in fact initiated by the girl, my son was facing 11 counts of dangerous crimes against children, each with a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years. This is because in Arizona, if you touch the breast it's one count, you touch the buttocks it's two counts, use your mouth it's three, and so on.

My son was potentially facing 110 years in prison, so he traded away his future and took a plea for 5 years.

As a mother, I was devastated. I never thought I would be visiting my son behind razor wire. But I was there every weekend for 5 long years to remind him that I knew who he was. I knew his life didn't have to be defined by this one act. I was there when he was beaten by other inmates. I was there when he was put in solitary confinement simply for asserting his rights, and I was there the day he came home.

He paid his debt to society, but his punishment will never be over. Lifetime probation and the sex offender registry make it impossible for him to lead anything close to a normal life. With 13 pages of restrictions, he can't use the internet; can't keep a meaningful job; can't go to common places like movie theaters, malls, public events, parks, churches or libraries; and worst of all he cannot have contact with his daughter.

Our society often supports these Draconian laws because they believe they help keep us safe. TV crime dramas and hyped up media reports have created a world where, when we say sex offender, the public hears sexual predator, and that simply is not the case. Many are put on the registry for passive crimes like viewing images, urinating outdoors, sexting, or getting involved with someone underage.

In fact, numerous studies show sex offender recidivism rates to be under 5%, and roughly 95% of new sex crimes are committed by people already known to the victim.

I remember when I was pregnant how I would cradle my swollen belly and pray to God, please don't take my baby. Like every mother, my instinct to protect my child was paramount. But in the end, it wasn't God who took my baby's life, it was my country. Our country. Since the 1980s our prison population has become the highest of any other country in the world. How many more of our children must we put in cages before it stops?

I recently sat in family court and listened to my son tell the judge how hard he had been working since his release to gain the trust of the system and so he could reestablish his relationship with his daughter. The state responded by filing a motion to sever his parental rights. It felt like the last nail in the coffin.

We must stop the fear mongering. When justice reform bills come before our legislature, we must have the courage to not only support them, but to ensure that sex offenders are not excluded. We must ensure that people like Dustin have a meaningful pathway back into our society. This is the way to ensure public safety.



Branded for Life

Elaina H

Pedophile. Predator. Child Rapist. Creep. I've heard all these disgusting words and more slung at my husband. None of them is true. The feeling of disgust can come from a valid place, especially if you are a survivor of sexual abuse or are the loved one of someone who has been sexually assaulted. I'm sorry for that pain. Deeply.

Like many people, I hated and was terrified of anyone who was called a sex offender – until I met, fell in love with and married Shawn.

Shawn was a teenage boy scarred by abuse when he was thrown from his home. It was then that he got into a compromising situation with a girl he mistook to be close to his own age. Shawn's crime didn't involve intercourse or violence. This isolated event earned him ten years in prison. He went in at 17, barely more than a child, and emerged at 27. He grew up in prison.

But his punishment did not end upon his release from prison. He (and I, by virtue of being his wife) have suffered many repercussions from Shawn's being branded a sex offender. Because of the prejudice against people labeled sex offenders, many of them find it difficult, if not impossible to find work. And due to multiple restrictions on where they can live, a large percentage are homeless.

They all walk with targets on their backs. They live in fear that their past mistakes or poor choices, often made when they were very young, will be discovered and they will suffer serious ramifications if their previous misconduct is exposed. Because the sex-offender registry is a matter of public record, it is easy for anyone to learn many personal details about those who are listed on it, including the legal description of their offense (which does not give you a clear picture of what they actually did), their picture, a physical description, and where they live. The following snippets from our lives demonstrate the kinds of harassment a person suffers when someone finds out he or she is a sex offender.

I chose to join the Army because it would guarantee us a roof over our heads and a solid income. But at my last duty station, Shawn invited a family he'd met at church to watch movies at our home. I was at work. Had he been any other person, this invitation wouldn't have raised an eyebrow. The family Shawn had spent the evening with later learned of his

“sex offender” status and called the Military Police. Although Shawn had broken no law, the MPs were required to “follow up.” Within two days we received our eviction notice — effective immediately. We had zero time to find a new home.

How was this possible? Shawn poses no threat to anyone. He was a military dependent and volunteer at the USO. He was a member of the Exceptional Family Medical Program because he has Multiple Sclerosis and needed access to the fort’s Community Hospital for specialty treatment — which he could no longer receive. The only thing that mattered was his brand – sex offender.

Once our longtime friends found out about Shawn’s past, many of them shunned both of us. I’ve been ostracized by coworkers as well as church congregants. Some will not even stand in the same room with me. Some demand I leave my husband or lose all the respect they ever had for me. (Really?) Then there are the strangers who knock on our door and warn us to stay away from them and their children. They tell us to move out or risk the wrath of the neighborhood. And wrath we have encountered over the past ten years! Car windows shattered, front porch smattered in broken eggs, children shouting at us, mailboxes smashed.

Shawn has received numerous death threats. Recently he was assaulted at a neighborhood pub where he has friends who know his past. He also has enemies there. As he was leaving, a man followed him to his car, waited until he got into the driver’s seat, then punched him in the face, threatening to kill him. The man was pulled away from the car by the owner of the pub. The police advised us not to press charges, as we would need corroboration. The witnesses, they told us, would likely take the side of the person hitting the sex offender. The most Shawn can expect is retaliation. Shawn came home bloody, swollen, and feeling more hopeless than I’ve ever seen him.

I love Shawn. I know who he is. I am deeply saddened and concerned about the consequences he faces due to the blind hatred and unfounded fear of people who draw conclusions about him based on the brand he wears – a label that follows him everywhere and exposes him to physical and emotional peril.

We will never have children. I've longed to be a mother most of my life. I love nurturing children and teaching them how beautiful the world can be. Shawn and I cannot conceive, and no surrogate or adoption agency would consider a couple like us. And how do you tell a boy why his father is not allowed to go on the Father-Son campout? How do you explain to a little girl why people ask her if Daddy has ever "touched" her? What do you say when your children want to have a sleepover or birthday party?

I was a soldier. I'm a daughter and a sister. I'm a friend. I'm an artist. I was a missionary. But along with Shawn I have been branded, and my main identity has become – "wife of a sex offender."

This collection of stories was written by AZRSOL participants and is their account of what has led them to speak out in opposition of the sex offender registry. AZRSOL has not verified the accuracy of any information in the stories and is not responsible for any misrepresentations or inaccuracies of fact or law. The facts listed below are accurate as of July 2019. The stories can be reprinted and distributed as long as this disclaimer remains fully attached.

FACTS vs myths

904,000+ names are on U.S. sex offender registries.

<http://www.missingkids.org>

In more than a third of sexual abuse cases against minors, the perpetrators were also juveniles; with victims under age 6, 40% of the offenders were juveniles.

<https://www.ncjrs.gov>

23% of contact offenders were under age 18 at the time of their offense, with 16% under age 12.

<https://www.bjs.gov>

Putting youth – some as young as 8 – on registries severely negatively impacts their futures.

<https://www.hrw.org>

Over 95% of new sexual crime is committed by persons NOT on a registry.

<http://psycnet.apa.org>

Public urination, sexting, underage sex, and indecent exposure can trigger a requirement to register.

<https://www.hrw.org>

Many registrants face unemployment, homelessness, instability, and personal danger.

<http://journals.sagepub.com>

Only a small fraction of those on registries are truly high-risk.

<https://www.ncjrs.gov>

“Stranger-danger” is rare; 90% or more of victims know their attackers, higher for children.

<https://www.rainn.org>

Re-offense is rare. The DOJ has reported a 5.3% re-arrest rate, and a 3.5% reconviction rate after 3 years.

<https://www.bjs.gov>

Research studies have found no relationship between having a registry and a decrease in sex offenses.

<http://psycnet.apa.org>

Sex offender registries put innocent family members of registrants in harm's way.

<https://link.springer.com>

Registrants are frequently denied special housing such as nursing home care and section 8 housing.

<https://www.theatlantic.com>

Former sex offenders are less and less likely to reoffend the longer they live offense-free.

<https://www.hrw.org>

Current sexual offense laws create conditions that lead to increased crime.

<https://qz.com>



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