

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/a-shift-away-from-registering-kids-as-sex-offenders/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

For years, states have been creating and toughening laws on sex offender registries, but policy makers and advocates are rethinking rules around placing juveniles on the lists that track offenders and can make information on them accessible to the public, according to an [article](#) published by [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#).

Recently, Oregon and Delaware passed laws giving more power to judges to review who goes on the lists, and the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania [put an end to lifetime registration](#) for minors.

So what is behind the shift?

While supporters say juvenile registries are vital for public safety, studies indicate that young offenders are unlikely to commit another sex crime. Elizabeth Letourneau, a professor with Johns Hopkins University, told Pew that youth sex-offender recidivism is usually less than 5 percent. A lot of them don't know what they are doing is wrong, Letourneau said. But they learn that very quickly, though, once they're going through the legal process.

And being listed can have a scarlet letter effect, making these youth depressed, anxious and the focus of vigilantes, according to the article.

Driving the changes are concerns that putting juveniles' names and photos on a registry even one only available to law enforcement, as in some states stigmatizes them in their schools and neighborhoods and makes them targets of police. Also of concern are laws that add youth sex offenders to adult registries once they turn 18 or 21, even though they were tried as juveniles, the piece states.

The article highlights a 2013 [Human Rights Watch](#) report, [Raised on the Registry: The Irreparable Harm of Placing Children on Sex Offender Registries](#). Written by Nicole Pittman, director of the Center on Youth Registration Reform at [Impact Justice](#), it tells the stories of over 250 young people who were placed on sex offender registries. One 10-year-old girl served time after she and her younger brothers flashed one another, and she was placed on her state's adult registry at 18. Another 10-year-old was convicted of indecency with a child for touching a younger cousin, and was made to register for life.

Most of those interviewed for the report said they had endured serious psychological harm, many had attempted suicide and nearly half experienced homelessness because of restrictions on where they could live.

Joshua Rosenthal, a staff attorney at Children's Rights, believes the issue deserves further attention.

It makes no sense to place children on these registries, Rosenthal said. Doing so has no real benefit to the public and causes tremendous harm to the lives of these young people.

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