

Eye on sexual offenders

Sentiment has been voiced that sexual offenders are being unfairly exposed to the harsh glare of the public eye.

We disagree.

Missouri lawmakers in 2004 approved a law that prohibits sexual offenders from living within 1,000 feet of any existing public school, private school or day-care facility. The votes were nearly unanimous — 158-1 in the House and 31-0 in the Senate.

Cole County Prosecutor Bill Tackett recently identified 39 registered sex offenders who live nearer to those facilities than the law allows. A map showing their locations was published in the News Tribune and is available at the Web site, www.colecopa.com

A list of sexual offenders in Cole County, their home addresses and offenses are listed at the county sheriff's Web site, www.cole-countysheriff.org

Tackett wants the offenders to show their residency preceded establishment of a school or day care. Failing that, he wants them to move before school begins.

Some people argue this action paints a proverbial scarlet letter on people who have paid their debt to society.

We believe prevention of future victimization deserves priority.

First, crimes have consequences. The offenders are listed because they committed criminal acts.

Second, studies have shown that sexual offenders cannot be cured. Some are able to control their impulses, but — like alcoholics — a relapse is an ever-present concern.

Third, innocent people — particularly children — must be protected.

The victimizations of Elizabeth Smart and Shasta Groene demonstrate how despicable sexual crime can be.

Then 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart was abducted in June 2002 from her home by a drifter and self-described prophet. He kept her until he was captured and she was freed in March 2003.

Some of 8-year-old Shasta's Groene's family members were slaughtered when she and her brother were abducted from her backyard in May. The alleged abductor later was arrested, Shasta was rescued and her brother is presumed dead.

These are horrific cases, but we argue any sexual offense is horrific for the victim. The wounds do not heal and the nightmare never ends.

If identifying sexual offenders helps prevent a crime, the effort will have proved worthwhile.