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Opposition Testimony Substitute House Bill 459

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairwoman White, Ranking Member Leland, Leader Seitz, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee: my name is John Fillinger, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in opposition to Substitute House Bill 459.

I understand and respect the motivation of the sponsors of this bill. Protecting those most vulnerable to sexual violence is obviously a worthy goal. However, this bill is yet another attack in the Forever War waged against Registered Citizens and their families. An elderly, bed-ridden registrant in Texas was recently blocked from moving in with family to receive end-of-life care, because the family members' home was within 1,000 feet of a public park. In Joliet, Illinois, the city council voted to buy a house, demolish it and turn it into a city park – a tactic that would allow them to force out registrants who were living in an apartment building nearby. In Brunswick, Ohio, residency restrictions have been drawn so that the only area open to registrants to live is zoned industrial.

Sub HB 459 would, like the examples mentioned above, continue the assault on the rights of registered citizens to live and participate in society. It would reinforce the image that registrants, regardless of the particular circumstances of their offense, and regardless of the actual risk they pose, are ongoing and significant threats to public safety.

Shouldn't any measure that takes away the rights of a parent be supported by clear and overwhelming evidence? Shouldn't any law that proposes to strip a parent of their ability to support and participate in their child's school and extra-curricular activities, be required to demonstrate that public safety requires the denial of such rights?

I have a loved one on the registry who recently married. Although he is low risk and was sentenced to probation, he is classified as Tier III in Ohio's offense-based system. He and his wife are uncertain about having children because of the many non-judicial sanctions he already faces and because his children would likely face bullying and ridicule due to his status. Passage of this bill would likely be the final straw for him. It would attack not only his rights as a parent, but also the rights of his children to have a father present at important moments in their lives.

Please do not allow irrational fears and feelings to trump plain facts. Please do not continue to wage a Forever War on people who have paid their debt to society. Please allow them the grace that other returning citizens receive. If you truly believe that people deserve a second chance and an opportunity for redemption, then vote this bill down.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I will try to answer any questions at this time.