OPPOSITION TO SB 67

Senator Bacon and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am writing in opposition to SB67. My credentials include being an LSW in Ohio, Director of Operations for Toledo for Prison Awareness, Steering Committee for the 10th International Prisoner Family Conference, Board member of CURE-SORT, member of the Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health, and a concerned citizen.

I understand the thought behind the idea of a Violent Offender Registry. If my daughter had been brutally murdered, I might feel that way. However, our legislature needs to respond with a sense of community and justice. I have spent a considerable amount of time studying the impact of the sex offender registry. I have observed its impact on returning citizens and even more importantly on family members. One important point I have noted is that law enforcement tends to support the ideas of registries and the mental health community tends to view registries as additional punishment and stigma. I am unaware of any testimony given the Committee by any member of the mental health community. I view this as a serious deficit in the work of the Committee and urge you to consult with members of the mental health community for a balanced view of the needs you are trying to address.

The testimony given thus far has featured the Ohio Attorney General, Lucas County Prosecutor, and various Sherriff’s departments. The Wood County Sherriff noted that knowledge is power as support for a public violent offender registry. However, the prevalence of plea bargains means that the conviction likely does not provide the knowledge needed. In addition, a registry is unable to list how the offender has responded to the conviction. The registry is static and unable to provide information on the offender’s current mental state. Thus, the knowledge from any registry is very distorted.

There are many studies from the sex offender registry which have demonstrated failure to improve community safety and our state representatives need to address how any other registry would work any better to improve community safety. Specifically, how would a violent offender registry make the community safer. One of many concerns is with domestic violence victims. Abusers are notoriously manipulative and it is easy to see an abuser tell the victim that reporting him would put him on a registry. We have already seen victims of incest fail to report for that reason.

In conclusion, I urge members of the Judiciary Committee to take the time for a careful review of all the available evidence and make your best decision based on your findings.