

## **Adolescents on the Sex Offender Registry Talking Points**

### **Background**

1. Massachusetts is one of only 15 states that places adolescents on the sex offender registry and allow for public notification for these teenagers.
2. Although MA has made the progressive decision to decriminalize sexual behaviors in children under 12, the sex offender registry still does not differentiate between youth under 18 and adult sex offenders.

### **The Problem**

3. Research has consistently shown that juvenile registration and notification does not improve public safety. It has no effect on either first-time offending or recidivism.
4. There is a substantial body of research that shows how damaging such laws can be to the still-developing youth and to their families, including increased stigma, isolation, shame, and risk of suicide. Also important, research has shown that adolescents placed on the registry are more likely to report being solicited for sex.

### **A Better Solution**

5. Research studies have shown again and again that most children and adolescents who engage in sexually problematic or sexually harmful behaviors will stop acting out—especially with a well-matched intervention. Massachusetts has already begun to invest in interventions for our younger children, but we need to do better for all of our youth.
6. It is time for Massachusetts to enact laws that:
  - a. clearly differentiate adult sex offenders from adolescents who have sexually abused,
  - b. invest in better interventions for all of our youth and
  - c. take the crucial step to remove all adolescents (including those charged as adolescents) from the sex offender registry.

## Registration Key Talking Points – Detailed Version

### Background

1. Massachusetts is one of only 15 states that places adolescents on the sex offender registry and allows for public notification for these youth. Registration policy requires adults and adolescents convicted of certain sexual offenses to register their home, work, and school address, and confirm other personal information on a regular basis with local law enforcement.
2. Although Massachusetts has made the progressive decision to decriminalize sexual behaviors in children under 12, the sex offender registry still does not differentiate between kids 12-18 and adults. But adolescents who commit sexual crimes are different from adults.
  - a. Teens may not be taught or have access to information about healthy sexual development and interests, boundaries, or consent.
  - b. There are many reasons that an adolescent may exhibit sexually problematic or sexually harmful behaviors (e.g., the behaviors may develop because of family violence, abusive and/or neglectful home environments, sexual reactivity, or exposure to sexualized adults or media at a young age).

### The Problem

3. There is a convincing body of research that shows that juvenile registration and notification policies do not improve public safety.
  - a. Studies have found juvenile registration and notification does nothing to stop first-time offending.
  - b. Research has also found that juvenile registration and notification does nothing to deter a sexual re-offense.
4. Putting an adolescent on the sex offender registry can be damaging to our youth and their families.
  - a. Most notable impacts include increased shame, stigma, and isolation. Research has shown that adolescents on the registry are more often solicited for sex by adults.
  - b. Registration creates obstacles to youths' ability to successfully live safely in our community by limiting their pro-social development, and their ability

to create positive peer relationships, positive connections to school, and lower family stress.

- c. To avoid the possibility of registration, families may be less likely to seek help for their adolescent child.

## **A Better Solution**

5. The growing consensus among experts is that rehabilitative approaches instead of punitive approaches are more effective in promoting public safety.
  - a. It is well documented that most children and youth who have acted out sexually will not reoffend, especially when they receive interventions matched to their individual needs.
  - b. With well-matched interventions, children and adolescents can learn to live safe, healthy lives in our communities.
  - c. There is no compelling evidence that shows that policies which place children and adolescents on the sex offender registry will result in a reduction of recidivism or keep our communities safe.
  - d. Massachusetts has already begun to invest in interventions for our younger children, but we need to do better for all of our youth.
6. Research studies have shown again and again that children and adolescents, even with the most serious of crimes, are amenable to treatment, especially if the intervention is offered early in their sexually abusive behaviors.
  - a. Evidence-based treatment approaches include developmentally sensitive, targeted interventions that include the adolescent, families, and other community supports through family and group therapy
7. It is time for Massachusetts to enact laws that clearly
  - a. differentiate adult sex offenders from adolescents and children,
  - b. invest in better interventions for all of our youth and
  - c. take the courageous step remove all adolescents (including those charged as adolescents) from the sex offender registry.