

SB 5123: Creating a developmentally appropriate response to youth who commit sexual offenses

WACDL and WDA strongly support this bill that seeks to end the ineffective and harmful requirement of youth sex offender registration. Registration fails to support victims or prevent harmful behavior and puts young people at increased risk of suicide and sexual assault. Combining rehabilitation with the elimination of registry requirements holds young people accountable for the serious harm caused while also giving them the tools they need to become successful and productive adults who do not cause future harm.

- **Requiring youth convicted in juvenile court to register as sex offenders neither prevents abuse nor increases public safety.** Research has demonstrated that youth who commit sexual offenses are extremely unlikely to reoffend. Adolescents continue to evolve intellectually and emotionally throughout their teenage years. They are particularly amenable to interventions that stress rehabilitation and treatment. Allowing courts to dismiss a case after successful completion of probation and treatment will enable youth to benefit most fully from rehabilitative services by removing harmful barriers to successful adolescence and adulthood.
- **Requiring young people convicted in juvenile court to register as sex offenders has a significant negative impact on their mental health, safety, and prospects for rehabilitation.** Suicide attempts by youth are a painful indicator of the harm registration causes. Registered youth are four times more likely to report having actively attempted suicide compared to unregistered youth. Research shows registered youth are five times more likely to be approached by an adult for sex and twice as likely to be the victim of sexual assault by an adult compared with unregistered youth. Lifelong sex offender registration also results in numerous collateral consequences, such as employment and housing discrimination, diminished mental health, and problems at school and with peers.
- **Youth of color are disproportionately convicted of sex offenses and required to register as sex offenders.** More than 2,000 individuals currently are on the state's sex offender registry for offenses committed as youth. Black and American Indian people are over-represented in the population of registered sex offenders.

For more information, contact:

Neil Beaver: (509) 975-9550 or neil.beaver@gmail.com; or

Ali Hohman: (425) 315-3837 or ali@defensenet.org.