

Changes to Kansas juvenile offender registration shelved

By Katie Moore

Posted Mar 25, 2018 at 5:15 PM

Updated Mar 25, 2018 at 9:35 PM

A Kansas House bill contemplating changes to juvenile offender registration has been delayed so that it can be reviewed by the Judicial Council.

The council will review the legislation and make recommendations on how to proceed, Rep. J. Russell Jennings, R-Lakin, said during a committee meeting last week. No legislative action is expected this session.

Last month, three people spoke in favor of the measure which proposed treating juvenile sex offenders the same as adult sex offenders in terms of registration requirements. Information on adult sex offenders is publicly available. In juvenile cases, judges have discretion on making registration public and on the length of registration.

The bill was propelled by the August 2017 double homicide of Alyssa Runyon and her daughter Zaylynn Paz. The pair were murdered in Newton by a man who had been convicted of sex crimes as a juvenile and whose information wasn't on the public offender registry.

Sarah Good, Runyon's aunt, said current law prioritizes the rights of the offender over the rights of the general public. Changing the law gives the public the opportunity to be aware, informed and protected, she said.

Runyon's father and Rep. John Whitmer, a Wichita Republican, also testified as proponents of the bill.

Several individuals and groups, including the Kansas Department of Corrections, opposed the measure.

Benet Magnuson, executive director of Kansas Appleseed, said Kansas case law has determined that it is ineffective and unfair to punish youths as though they were adults.

During an interview last week, Nicole Pittman, director of the Center on Youth Registration Reform, said research has shown youth registration is ineffective and that resources should be redirected towards prevention and treatment. Research has also determined that youth registration can be harmful.

A Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health report published in December found that youth required to register were four times as likely to report a recent suicide attempt compared to juveniles who weren't required to register.

"We're creating a bad situation for our kids by putting them on registries," Pittman said.

Ten states have never registered juveniles, Pittman added.

The Kansas Bureau of Investigation's database has 851 juvenile offenders, the agency's spokeswoman, Nicole Hamm, said. The KBI supports the registry in its current form, she said.

In Shawnee County, there are 43 juvenile offenders who would be affected by the legislation, Det. Dustin Carlat, with the Shawnee County Sheriff's Office, said. The proposed bill also would have increased the length of juvenile registration, he added. Juveniles have to register until they reach age 18, when they are released from confinement or at the expiration of five years from the date of adjudication. However adults must register for 15 years, 25 years or have lifetime registration, depending on the crime.

Kansas juveniles who have been convicted of certain violent and drug crimes would also have been required to publicly register under the proposed measure, as adult offenders are required.

A bill referred to the House committee on corrections and juvenile justice would remove the requirement to register for drug offenders.

Offenders who are ordered to register must report to their local office four times a year and pay a fee each time. They must register in every county where they live, work and go to school, Carlat said.