

## SOAPBOX

# Why kids don't belong on sex offender registry

BY NICOLE PITTMAN  
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California took an important step toward ending the abusive practice of putting kids on sex offender registries when Gov. Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 384, which allows juveniles to petition for their removal after five or 10 years.

## Opinion

When California became the first state to register children as sex offenders in 1986, there was little known about children who commit sexual offenses. At that time, treating them the same as adults seemed sensible. Today, we have research that tells us that putting them on registries does not prevent future child sexual abuse and can diminish public safety.

Roughly 200,000 people on sex offender registries – including more than 3,500 in California – went on as kids, some for serious crimes but many others for playing doctor, streaking or teenage romances.

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Sex offender registration laws stigmatize and isolate the very children they were meant to protect, ensuring their youthful indiscretions follow them into adulthood. Names, photos, and addresses are often made public, leading to vigilante violence, stigmatization, and severe psychological

harm. One in five attempt suicide; too many succeed. There's also now a strong body of evidence demonstrating that very few youth commit more sexual crimes.

Child sexual abuse is a serious but preventable problem, but our policies and laws are only designed to respond as if abuse is inevitable and largely ignore solutions that prevent harm. The state budget allocates only \$46,000 annually for prevention and victim services while the cost to register children is about \$144 million.

Instead of using valuable resources to punish kids who harm, we should redirect them to evidence-based treatment and intervention.

While SB 384 offers a rare ray of hope, California can and must fully eliminate the policy of putting children on the sex offender registry. By doing so, we can prevent sexual harm and begin to create healthy, hopeful communities where all kids can be kids.



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