

## Justice Talking Listening Guide SHOULD SEX OFFENDERS HAVE CIVIL RIGHTS?

11/14/05

### SHOW SUMMARY

New laws give government significant powers to track and penalize defendants convicted of sex crimes, even after they have served their time. In some states, offenders can be committed to mental hospitals after they are released from jail if the state believes they are likely to commit further crimes. Other laws require offenders to register with local police or publicize where ex-offenders live, presumably to safeguard young children who live nearby. Join us on this edition of Justice Talking as we talk about the rights of those convicted of sex crimes.



John La Fond



Bruce Winick



Ernie Allen



Stacie Haines



Kellie Greene

- Part 1: **John La Fond**, a lawyer and the author of "Sexually Violent Offenders, Law, Science and Policy," speaks about how the justice system and individual communities have dealt with sex offenders throughout history. **Segment Start Time – 2:34**

- Part 2: Producer **Judith Smelser** reports on the unintended consequences of sex offender registries—how they can hurt the families and friends of people who have been convicted of such crimes—with the story of the Pratt family in Rocklitch, Florida. **Segment Start Time – 13:33**

- Part 3: **Bruce Winick**, a law professor and a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Miami, and **Ernie Allen**, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, debate the effectiveness of current laws affecting sex offenders and what should be done to prevent abuse. **Segment Start Time – 18:50**

- Part 4: During the debate, **Mary Catherine Roper**, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union of Philadelphia, speaks about a current case where a newborn baby was taken from his mother because his father, who doesn't live with the mother, was convicted of a sex offense 23 years ago. **Segment Start Time – 23:10**

- Part 5: Also during the debate, **Stacie Haines**, founder and executive director of Generation Five, an organization dedicated to ending child sexual abuse within five generations, speaks about how her approach differs from that of the criminal justice system. **Segment Start Time – 33:25**

- Part 6: **Kellie Greene**, the director of Speaking Out About Rape, and a rape survivor, talks from a victim's rights point of view about how society should deal with sex offenders. **Segment Start Time – 41:26**

The New York Times  
LearningNetwork

Read about a national effort to educate America's 21 million teens who use the Internet, and their parents, about the risks of meeting strangers online in the New York Times article "**Blunt Ads for Teenagers Warn of Net Predators.**"

[http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured\\_articles/20050609thursday.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20050609thursday.html)



Host Margot Adler

Margot Adler is a National Public Radio correspondent based in NPR's New York Bureau. Adler's thirty years of experience as a radio host and reporter enable her to explore today's issues in an entertaining and insightful manner. She is the author of several books and lives in New York City with her husband and son.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Megan's Laws** – The common term for a number of state laws that require law enforcement authorities to identify the names of sex offenders and tell the public where they live. In some cases, this information is posted on the Internet. Most of these laws require sex offenders to notify the local police department of any change of address after being released from prison. This requirement may be imposed permanently upon the offender, or for a fixed period of time (usually at least ten years) depending on the individual state. The first Megan's Law was passed in New Jersey in 1994 after the rape and murder of Megan Nicole Kanka by a convicted sex offender who was living across the street from her. On May 17, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed a federal version of Megan's Law as an amendment to the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children Act. It required every state to develop some procedure for notifying concerned people when a person convicted of certain crimes is released near their homes.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does the law effectively strike a balance between the rights of convicted sex offenders and their families and the rights of the public? If not, how might the law be improved?



The news seems to be filled with disturbing stories of sexual abuse. Is sexual abuse a mental illness, a criminal behavior, or both? And does treatment for the perpetrators work?

Listen to the National Public Radio report "***The Science of Sex Abuse***"  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4651059>.