

# **Matthew L. Ferrara, Ph.D.**

**Clinical and Forensic Psychology**

**4833 Spicewood Springs Road**

**Suite 101 Austin, TX 78759**

**Tele: 512-708-0502**

**[mferraraphd@outlook.com](mailto:mferraraphd@outlook.com)**

## **In reference to the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session and Issues Related to Residency Restrictions**

My name is Matthew L. Ferrara, Ph.D. I'm a forensic psychologist in private practice in Austin, Texas. I began working with sex offenders in 1985. During my career as a forensic psychologist, I have created every major sex offender treatment program in the State of Texas. Specifically, I designed and implemented the sex offender treatment programs for the juvenile prison system, adult prison system, and the Sexually Violent Predator Program. I am currently appointed by Governor Abbott to the Crime Victim Institute Advisory Council. I am in private practice, where I assess and treat sex offenders on probation, parole, and US Probation, in Travis County and the surrounding counties.

Given my 39 years of experience assessing and treating sex offenders, I would like to advise you against implementing any rules that create proximity restrictions for registered sex offenders. Please consider the following:

- Most sexual abuse victims know the person who sexually abuses them as a family member, friend of the family, neighbor, church member, or similar type of relationship. Proximity restrictions will not impact the most common types of child sexual abuse.
- When a sex offense takes place in a school, community center, or similar setting, the perpetrator is usually an employee who is authorized to be present. Residency restrictions will not affect this type of crime.
- Most new sexual offenses are committed by individuals who have never before committed a sexual offense. In a 2003 study by the US Department of Justice, it was determined that 92% of all new sex offenses were committed by individuals never before identified as a sex offender.
- Proximity restrictions create a false sense of security. Parents and guardians of children concerned about child molestation might think their job is partially complete if there are proximity restrictions. That is not true. The greatest danger for a new sexual offense comes from within their own home, not outside.
- Stress is known to trigger a sex offender and cause sex offenders to engage in sexually abusive behavior. Proximity restrictions can increase the stress registered sex offenders feel by causing them to live in high-crime areas, distant from family and friends, and in less desirable neighborhoods.
- There is no empirical evidence that proximity restrictions reduce sex crimes or any other type of crime.

- Requiring law enforcement to enforce proximity restrictions means law enforcement officers spend time and effort in activities that are not associated with reducing crime. At the same time, involving law enforcement officers in proximity restriction efforts removes them from activities that could reduce crime. The net effect is proximity restrictions make the community less safe.
- Enforcement of proximity restrictions costs money. Since there is no empirical evidence that proximity restrictions can reduce crime, this is a very questionable use of public funds.

The State of Texas is already doing many things that reduce the risk of new sex offenses. There is more that we can do. I am available to discuss those things if you desire. If we do talk about ways to reduce sex crimes further, I will not be recommending residency restrictions for the reasons listed above.

All I have done for the past 39 years is create sex offender treatment programs and provide assessment and treatment to sex offenders designed to reach the goal of **No More Victims**. I only use evidence-based treatments. I would never rely on proximity restrictions as an intervention to help me reach my goal of **No More Victims**.

Sincerely

Signed electronically, *Matthew L. Ferrara, Ph.D.*

[www.doctorferrara.com](http://www.doctorferrara.com)