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New bills target released sex offenders

By **Stephanie Sievers, Springfield Bureau, Sng2@springnet1.com, 217-524-5797**

SPRINGFIELD -- Few criminals are as feared and reviled as sex offenders and during an election year, they can become obvious political targets for lawmakers wanting to get tough on crime.

A number of bills restricting sex offenders already have been introduced in Springfield and while many have good intent or at least will spark some lively discussions, many won't go anywhere, said Rep. Robert Molaro, a Chicago Democrat who chairs the House's criminal law committee.

"A lot of them have to be worked out. A lot of them have to be vetted. There's a cost to all of these, so a lot of them are not going to be heard this session," he said.

Sex offenders can be particularly troublesome to lawmakers. They want to do all they can to protect children and the public while keeping in mind the legal rights of offenders who have served their time, Molaro said.

A proposal to bar convicted sex offenders from ever voting again is one that raises red flags for the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois.

Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville, has introduced legislation that would prohibit sex offenders from being within 100 feet of a school bus stop and from voting at a school if that is the designated polling place.

Rep. John Bradley, D- Marion, has added an amendment, banning sex offenders from voting at all.

"It's my thought well, let's go all the way. Let's go where we're heading here, which is total prohibition," he said.

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"I think we understand that the situation unfortunately with this specific group of crimes is so heinous, so troubling, so reoccurring that sometimes we have to put restrictions on this group of people that we wouldn't normally put on others," Bradley said.

But Mary Dixon, of the ACLU, said she doesn't see the logic in disenfranchising an entire group of felons.

"It is troublesome that we're getting closer and closer to outright banishment of sex offenders," Dixon said.

Other measures run the gamut from putting some sex offenders on conditional release for an indeterminate time to making it a crime to rent housing to a sex offender if it's known he or she hasn't registered.

Rep. Patrick Verschoore, D-Milan, said he's trying to retool his bill that would prohibit a sex offender from being within 2,000 feet of a school, daycare or park. It's raised concerns by some because it would effectively prohibit sex offenders from living in many urban areas including Chicago and surrounding Cook County.

Verschoore's said his real goal is to stop sex offenders from Iowa, which has a 2,000-foot rule, from moving into Illinois, where the law is only 500 feet.

He's working with the Illinois Department of Corrections to see if the bill can be changed, leaving the Illinois law the same, but requiring out-of-state sex offenders to be bound by the restrictions of the state where they committed the crime.

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