

## D.C. Police List Sex Offenders On Internet, With a Warning

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A partial list of the District's worst sex offenders was posted on the Internet by D.C. police yesterday, following the lead of Virginia and 26 other states in complying with a federal law that allows the public to know where offenders live.

But the American Civil Liberties Union and the D.C. Public Defender Service, which oppose the move, say the District has discretion about how to interpret the law and has opted for what ACLU officials call "one of the most draconian versions" of the law in the country.

The registry includes only those people convicted of violent sex crimes or serious offenses against minors, called "Class A," after a federal judge imposed a temporary restraining order that prohibited the posting of offenders who committed less serious sex crimes.

But D.C. Police Chief Charles H. Ramsey also warned against vigilantism and said police will not tolerate using the list to harass or threaten sex offenders.

"These people have already been arrested, already been convicted," Ramsey said. "It's up to our court system to pass judgment and punish them, not individual citizens."

Under the law, any person convicted of certain sex crimes has to register with the city if they live, work or attend school in the District. It's the city's version of Megan's Law, named for Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old New Jersey girl murdered in 1994 by a sex offender living across the street.

Since the D.C. law's passage in July 1999, police and court officials have compiled the registry, Ramsey said.

The registry can be searched by first or last name, as well as by city quadrant or police district.

The Web site -- [www.mpdcc.org](http://www.mpdcc.org) -- provides the offender's name and photograph and details home and work addresses by block. It also provides a link that details the offender's age, weight, height and conviction.

D.C. police also put the 111 names in books yesterday, available for review at police district headquarters, Ramsey said.

At a U.S. District Court hearing last week, government lawyers maintained that the law does not infringe upon privacy rights and served a legitimate community purpose. But Arthur Spitzer, legal director of the area chapter of the ACLU, said the D.C. Council went too far when it drafted the law.

"They are doing more than what the federal law requires them to do by far," Spitzer said. He said the District's law is too broad in scope because "it covers anything having to do with sex, including minor misdemeanors." He also said the law is written so that "it extends back in time indefinitely."

Spitzer also said the scope of disclosure is too broad. "In many states, the information is only disclosed to those who are perceived to be at some risk, like schoolmates or neighbors, but the way it's set up now,

the whole world can see it."

Spitzer said two immediate court challenges are at hand. The D.C. Public Defender Service filed suit last month on behalf of five "John Does" who contended they would suffer great harm if information about them became public. Another case is before the D.C. Court of appeals, brought by a person required to register in 1996, before Megan's Law existed.

The two other classes include convictions for offenses such as statutory rape, lewd conduct, obscenity and prostitution. It may be summer before it's decided what to do with that information, Spitzer said.

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