

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



FOR INFORMATION CALL

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Common Council members call on state to house sex offenders elsewhere

Members of the Milwaukee Common Council sharply criticized a state program that houses dangerous sex offenders in residential neighborhoods this week, calling it “disruptive to neighborhoods” and a “foolish waste of taxpayers’ money.”

Alderman Tony Zielinski, Alderman Jim Bohl, Alderman Bob Donovan and Alderman José G. Pérez called upon Governor Scott Walker and the state legislature to take immediate action that would establish a centralized facility to house such offenders, rather than placing them in quiet communities.

“This program lands like a cluster bomb on the neighborhoods it impacts,” Alderman Zielinski said. “What was once a quiet neighborhood surrounding E. Van Beck Ave. in my district is now in an absolute uproar over a violent sex offender who is being put up in a rental house. I know of at least one resident who has already moved out, and many others are deeply concerned for their safety, their *children’s* safety and the decline in their quality of life.”

“What’s even more appalling is that, through their state tax dollars, these same residents are paying this sex offender’s rent—and they’re getting ripped off, to boot!”

Wisconsin’s most dangerous sex offenders are housed at the Sand Ridge Treatment Center in Mauston under Wisconsin's Chapter 980 law, which allows inmates deemed sexually violent to be held for mental health treatment, even after they complete prison terms. But every year, a number of these offenders meet conditions for discharge and are released back to their counties of origin, under supervision. There, they are placed in homes the state rents on their behalf, Alderman Zielinski said, often at grossly inflated rates.

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Sex offender housing/ADD ONE

Alderman Zielinski pointed to a media report that found the State of Wisconsin pays double or even triple the going rate to rent the homes in which these sexually violent persons are placed. The same report calls into question the business practices of one of the owners of these homes, and notes that the state actually works cooperatively with that owner to identify homes where sex offenders could be housed that are available for purchase.

“It’s absolutely shameful for the state to subsidize such shady business practices with taxpayer money,” Alderman Zielinski said. “It not only fails the smell test, it stinks outright.”

Since March, the state’s Legislative Audit Bureau has been looking into the release program. Lawmakers who ordered the audit cited “growing concerns regarding placement and expenditures made by the Department of Health Services for housing of sex offenders on supervised release,” and asked the bureau to “evaluate the placement process of individuals, analyze the cost and expenditures of supervised release programs and also assess supervised release program outcomes.” Audit results are expected later this year.

But Alderman Zielinski called the audit a half-measure, saying that what really is needed is the creation of a state facility to house released violent sex offenders and an end to the program that places them in residential neighborhoods. Such a facility has been proposed in the past, but was scrapped in the planning process.

“Governor Walker and legislators cannot in good conscience sit back and allow these sexually violent offenders, who have previously been deemed likely to reoffend, to be sent out among our playgrounds, our schools and our communities,” Alderman Zielinski said. “It’s destroying neighborhoods, it’s fleecing taxpayers and it’s a recipe for eventual disaster.”