

House Republican Press Release

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Rep. Ryan Applauds Passage of Jessica's Law and Additional Sex Offender Laws



“Requires Mandatory Sentences for Predators”

HARTFORD – State Representative John J. Ryan, (R-141st District) joined a unanimous House of Representatives in passing and approving two bills to strengthen current sex offender laws in Connecticut.

The legislation SB-1458, known as “Jessica’s Law,” would create a new crime of “aggravated sexual assault of a minor” if a person commits a sex offense against a child under the age of thirteen. The bill also contains numerous aggravating factors that would trigger the new system including kidnap, stalking offenses and offenses against multiple victims. The bill was patterned after Florida’s “Jessica’s Law,” that was passed in response to the kidnapping and killing of 9 year old Jessica Lunsford by a released pedophile.

This legislation, which now goes to the floor of the Senate, changes the mandatory penalty. Under this law a first conviction for aggravated sexual assault of a minor will result in a 25 year sentence but a second offense draws a mandatory 50 year sentence. This change was a result of the head prosecutor's concern that any sentence of life imprisonment requires a probable cause hearing - a second hearing where a child victim would have to testify and face cross examination. In an effort to spare children from the trauma of testifying twice, and to prevent defense attorneys from having a second chance to derail a conviction, a fifty year sentence was proposed.

“The bill strengthens our laws against child predators and gives prosecutors more tools to deal with these dreadful cases,” said Rep. Ryan. “Crimes against children are the most difficult and heartbreaking to deal with. Convictions should carry the harshest penalties against these types of predators. Hopefully, passage of this law will protect children in Connecticut.”

HB 7085 An Act Concerning the Statute of Limitations for Prosecution of Certain Sexual Offenders also passed and requires the Risk Assessment Board to determine under guidelines which sexual offenders shall be prohibited from residing within one thousand feet of public or private elementary or secondary schools and day care facilities.

In addition to the Risk Assessment Board provision, the bill also toughens up current sex offender laws by requiring sex offenders to provide their e-mail and instant message addresses to the Commissioner of Public Safety under the state's Meghan's Law requirements. Failure to comply will carry the same penalties for not reporting an offender's physical addresses, which carries a jail term of up to 5 years (class D felony).

Rep. Ryan said, "The saturation of communication technology in our culture can be a blessing and a curse. This legislation attempts to deal with some of the more dangerous characters online."

Very importantly, this bill creates a class C felony for misrepresentation of age to entice a minor punishable of 1 to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000 and also allows victims to petition the court at any time to remove a sex offender from the Department of Public Safety's restricted registry.

Additionally, the new law would make persons who service or repair personal computers mandated reporters of suspected child abuse.

"Connecticut was one of the first states to enact Megan's Law, and now in the age of super fast information, we need to update those statutes so that law enforcement will have the proper tools to identify predators online," said Ryan."

Megan's Law is named for 7 year-old Megan Kanka of New Jersey, who was killed in 1994 by a sex offender living near her home. In 1995, Connecticut passed legislation mandating notification of residents that a sex offender was living in their neighborhood. A 1997 law made those addresses available to the general public. Originally placed on-line in 1999, a federal court removed the convicted sex offender list from the Internet in 2001 citing constitutional grounds, but the United States Supreme Court overturned the ruling in 2003.

The two bills await now the signature of Governor M. Jodi Rell.