



Sex Offenders Illegally In The U.S. - Are They Living Next Door?

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A New Jersey lawmaker is pushing a plan to crack down on unauthorized immigrants living in the Garden State who have been convicted or were charged with a sex crime in another country.

According to state Sen. Joe Pennacchio, R-Morris, his proposed legislation will make Megan's Law apply to people who would be recognized as sex offenders overseas or across the border.

Megan's Law — named after the late Mercer County girl Megan Kanka, who was raped and strangled by her Hamilton sex offender neighbor in 1994 — creates a registry that requires police to disclose the location of registered sex offenders.

Pennacchio said the measure would require law enforcement officials in New Jersey to notify Immigration and Customs Enforcement “if they have somebody that’s illegal that’s been convicted of a crime where Megan’s Law has to be applied.”

Pennacchio says that under a directive issued last year by the state Attorney General’s Office, law enforcement is not always required to cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

"A criminal coming from another country who has committed a similar crime, I think the public still has a right to know. Why would we want to do Megan’s Law and then create a loophole?" he said. “The fact that we’re a sanctuary state allows them to hide anonymously.”

The directive, which was criticized by ICE, does not allow police to stop or question people based solely on their suspected immigration status or to question them about their status unless it is relevant to the investigation. And while the directive does not allow local police to participate in civil immigration enforcement, the rules do not limit police cooperation with federal immigration authorities in criminal matters.

Pennacchio said he’s concerned unauthorized immigrants from other parts of the world who are sex offenders may be walking around New Jersey and nobody has any idea.

Immigration hardliners get pushback from advocates citing data that indicates that fears of crimes committed by unauthorized immigrants are overblown.

An analysis published last year by the libertarian Cato Institute finds that immigrants, whether they are here legally or illegally, are less likely to be incarcerated than the native-born population. And while about 13 percent of the federal prison population is in the country

illegally, about half of those arrests were related to immigration-related offenses, not violent crimes.

But Pennacchio said that the communities that his proposal would help the most would be the places where these sex offenders are hiding — neighborhoods with high populations of immigrants.

“Quite frankly, I think they belong out of the country. We don’t need them. We have enough issues in our country without having to import that kind of crime.”