

Sex Offender Housing Restrictions Could be Counterproductive

By David L. Lewis : WNYC Metro
Editor

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Sex offenders may be the most reviled criminals in the justice system. The fear of them is so great that lawmakers have placed severe restrictions on where they can live, even after they've served time in prison.

A new report from [The New York World](#) says those restrictions not only could make it harder for them to safely and successfully reenter society, but also may place some communities at risk.

The Sexual Assault Reform Act, or SARA, bars high-risk offenders from living within 1,000 feet of schools and other institutions serving children. In a city like New York, this makes it exceptionally hard to find housing for them.

This means sex offenders concentrate in clusters, like a home in Far Rockaway that houses 23 offenders, and an illegal rooming house in Flatbush which houses 19.

Columbia Journalism School fellow Jenny Zou said that this approach may prevent sex offenders from successfully reentering society, driving them underground and making them harder for parole officers to keep tabs on them.

"To cut an offender's chance of re-offending, you really need to give the offender access to stable housing with community support," Zou told WNYC's Richard Hake. And she said clustering offenders together places a burden on the communities that house them. "[These areas are] typically already low-income and they have high unemployment and high poverty. At the same time, the offenders themselves might be impacted by having to live with other sex offenders."

- **David L. Lewis, WNYC Metro Editor**

David L. Lewis is a veteran New York City journalist with 30 years of experience in print and broadcast media. His feature-length documentary, *The Pleasures of Being Out of Step*, a profile of the legendary ...

