

Greetings Representatives,

Thank you for your time to consider my written testimony regarding HB 5679. I pray this finds you safe and healthy along with all those you hold dear.

Let me start by expressing my deep frustration that I am unable to exercise my rights to safely testify in person without exposing myself, family and community to the Covid-19 virus and violating Governor Whitmer's Stay at Home order. The fact that this hearing is being held in the midst of the pandemic is very disheartening and carries an overtone of an attempt to fast track a bill that in my unprofessional opinion does not address all of the issues Judge Cleland deemed unconstitutional.

As a SORA registrant I fall into a subclass of citizens that borders on being a pariah in my community. The application of the Tier system places me in a further subclass that rates me from bad to worst in the public eye.

Living in rural, small town Michigan the 1000 ft. school safety zone is perhaps the most debilitating portion of the act I deal with on a daily basis. My options for daily activities like shopping, getting gas and dining are severely limited without fear of unwittingly violating the safety zone or being sabotaged by being accused of loitering within the same. If I ever need to find new housing my options will be severely limited. I'll never be able to return to the family grocery business where I spent over 25 years of my life serving my community. Even my choices for worship and therapy are restricted as well.

There are no doubt dangerous offenders that need more supervision and scrutiny than others. However I implore you to instead of applying a one size fits all, cookie cutter approach to offenders you consider objective, evidence based legislation that provides low risk offenders an opportunity to get off the registry. We are not all the same. We all have stories on how we got here and what we have done with our lives since our convictions.

I myself have been assessed as low risk a total of five times since the onset of my case. Three times by MDOC and twice by private therapy. My risk was so low that I was not ordered to take sex offender class while incarcerated or as part of my parole provisions. However per the advice of my parole agent I voluntarily took the class and completed it with a highly favorable discharge. I have no criminal record of any kind outside of my case which occurred over 9 years ago. To borrow language from the MDOC Parole Board, my case was highly situational with little to no possibility of ever recurring. These facts are totally contradicted by being a Tier III registrant. Publicly the worst of the worst and on the registry for life.

As far as what I've done with myself since the onset of my case. I quickly immersed myself in therapy and a long road of recovery and self improvement. Primarily I have found a new life pursuing addiction recovery. With over 3 years of physical, emotional and spiritual sobriety, for the first time in more years than I can count I can look at myself in the mirror with comfort and confidence and know that on a 24 hour basis I am moving forward as the man, son, father, brother, grandfather, friend and community member I am meant to be. I have found I have a passion and skill to help others in addiction recovery. During my incarceration I was the lead facilitator for the AA/NA group for over a year and a half at G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility. My efforts weren't confined to the group. I likely spent more time working with other inmates in my housing unit and on the yard than I did in the group itself. Since my release I rejoined my home AA group and established myself as a leader there. I was beginning the pursuit of further volunteer or perhaps career work in addiction recovery prior to the onset of Covid-19. I greatly look forward to resuming this pursuit once the pandemic subsides. I can't express enough my firm belief that the tools of addiction recovery are not just about addiction. It's about learning coping and life skills to deal with day to day life and a constant pursuit of being a better human being on a day to day basis.

In closing I would like to state that if it wasn't for me being as grounded as I am in my recovery I fear how the shadow of a lifetime of SORA would affect my life. I see myself more prone to depression, anxiety and return to alcohol abuse knowing I had no way out of the registry and the brand it has placed on me. I fear for those registrants that lack those skills. Please consider moving away from punitive legislation and pass laws that further public safety by supporting offenders who are intent on being law abiding citizens. Don't give those who have served their time a potential life sentence on the outside.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nicholas E. DeMond