

Dear members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Justin Teays. In May 2017 I was convicted in the state of Michigan for CSC4 for an offense involving a woman over the age of 30. I am currently on Michigan's Sex Offender Registry as a Tier I offender. I am writing to oppose House Bill 5679.

Upon learning that I was being charged for my misconduct three years ago, I decided to do the right thing and take responsibility for my offense. I plead No Contest to the charge and issued a formal apology to the victim at my sentencing hearing. As a first time offender with a clean slate, I was sentenced to five years probation.

During my initial probation hearing, I was shocked to learn that I would most likely have to move from my home because it is within a School Safety Zone. I was confused by this, because my offense had nothing whatsoever to do with a child. Nevertheless I was formally evicted from my home in October of 2017. I have moved twice since then.

I purchased my home in 2008 with the intent of living there for the long term. My home is in a safe, serene neighborhood and has provided me in prior years with a sense of security and well-being. Since being forced to move away, that sense of security has been replaced with a grim feeling of uncertainty, both about where I live now and where I might live in the future.

Just as bad is living with the uncertainty of where I might be able to find work post-Covid-19. I was recently furloughed from my job as a cab driver, and while it may be possible to return to my job someday, it is also possible that my company could contract and permanently slash positions, potentially leaving me out of work. Having restrictions on where I may work makes the task of finding future employment that much more difficult, particularly in a densely populated area such as the one I currently live in, where many schools and places of work are close together.

Studies have shown that exclusion zones have little to no effect on recidivism. The U.S. Department of Justice recommends against offender exclusion zones because the zones do not reduce crime:

“Restrictions that prevent convicted sex offenders from living near schools, daycare centers, and other places where children congregate have generally had no deterrent effect on sexual reoffending, particularly against children. In fact, studies have revealed

that proximity to schools and other places where children congregate had little relation to where offenders met child victims.”

As the federal courts have affirmed and re-affirmed time and again, our current SORA amounts to punishment, and punishment is the only way I can make sense of having been forced from my home. Exclusion zones separate families, and leave registrants homeless and out of work.

As I Tier I offender my time on the registry will expire after 15 years have lapsed. As such, I am planning on returning to my home someday. I have worked hard for it, and as of this writing there is no better place for me to go. It is my hope that necessary changes to SORA will make that happen sooner rather than later.

I thank you all in advance for your careful consideration in re-crafting Michigan's SORA.

Regards,

Justin Teays