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Community Notification in Washington State: Decision-Making and Costs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington State's Community Protection Act includes a provision allowing public officials to warn communities about potentially dangerous sex offenders when they are released from incarceration.

The statute does not specify how dangerousness is to be assessed, nor does it establish methods for notification. Local jurisdictions, therefore, have implemented the law in a variety of ways.

This paper describes how local jurisdictions determine, with assistance from the state, which sex offenders are dangerous, and how they notify the public. A sample of jurisdictions were contacted to ascertain their decision-making procedures and costs.

The key findings are as follows:

- **Legal Parameters:** Washington State court decisions have provided a framework for the law's implementation.
- **Risk Assessment:** The state plays a significant role in assessing the dangerousness of sex offenders released from prison and other state facilities. This assessment increases the uniformity of local decision-making.
- **Costs:** Local costs associated with community notification have varied greatly. In some jurisdictions, sex offenses receive a higher priority than they received prior to the law and additional personnel have been allocated. Other jurisdictions have implemented the law within existing resources.