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Adult Sex Offender Registration in Washington State: Initial Compliance, 1990

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines early compliance of adult sex offenders with a new registration requirement enacted as part of the Community Protection Act of 1990 (Chapter 3, Laws of 1990). The analysis compared Washington State Patrol records of registered adult sex offenders as of November 9, 1990, with records of sex offenders released from correctional or mental health institutions, or sentenced to supervision, on or after the effective date of the law. Juvenile offender registration is not included in this analysis.

Findings indicate that:

- **In the first eight months of sex offender registration under the Community Protection Act, the most serious adult offenders released from prison registered at a higher percentage (73 percent) than adult sex offenders released from jail or mental institutions (56 percent). The overall rate of registration for all adult sex offenders was 57 percent; a total of 2,383 adult sex offenders were registered at the time of this study.** Percentages are shown in Figure 1 (see page 2).
- **Sex offenders notified both verbally and in writing had a higher rate of compliance.** The manner in which sex offenders are notified of the requirement to register, whether in person or by mail, may explain the difference in registration rates.
- **The effectiveness of the registration law has been enhanced by cooperation between the Washington State Patrol and the Department of Corrections.** The names of sex offenders released by the Department of Corrections are supplied to the State Patrol and placed on the law enforcement computer database, thus allowing local law enforcement officers to identify both offenders who have and have not complied with the registration law. Local law enforcement can use this information when identifying potential suspects for a sex offense, as well to pursue actions against offenders not in compliance.
- **The state of California has required sex offender registration since 1947. Compliance for Washington in 1990 was lower than California's compliance rate for 1981 convictions, but higher than California's rate for 1973 convictions.**
- **The constitutionality of sex offender registration is under review.** Recent court cases regarding this topic are identified in this report.

Findings contained in this report should be considered preliminary. Publicity regarding penalties imposed on offenders who fail to register could change registration rates, as could reports of negative citizen reaction when identified sex offenders move into neighborhoods. Also, because of the relatively small size of groups available for analysis, especially the most serious offenders, the percentages reported are susceptible to change.