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# LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVES ON SEX OFFENDER REGISTRATION AND NOTIFICATION

## Supplemental Report Open-Ended Responses on Policy Recommendations

**July 2016**

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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The data presented in this report are drawn from a national survey, administered online in the spring of 2015, as the second part of a two-phase national study to elicit law enforcement perspectives on the functions, utility, and operation of sex offender registration and notification systems in the United States. The study's first phase featured a series of semi-structured interviews conducted in 2014 with 105 law enforcement professionals in five states and two tribal jurisdictions. Items for this survey were developed based on themes, experiences, and perspectives emerging from those interviews.

The survey was administered through the services of Campbell Rinker, a marketing research and survey firm. Participants were invited to complete the survey via targeted email outreach, utilizing a nationwide commercial list of 8,840 police chiefs and command staff and a list of 2,921 county sheriffs obtained from the National Sheriffs Association. Following initial outreach, prospective respondents were contacted through three waves of follow-up. The survey was open for five weeks between April and May of 2015.

The transmittal email included details on the survey scope and purpose, and a link to the survey. Respondents were informed that the survey was intended for completion by agency leadership (e.g., police chiefs, sheriffs), personnel involved in sex offender registration and management, and specialized personnel involved in sex crime investigations. The survey items presented to each respondent varied, with piping logic based on stated agency functions, respondent roles, and jurisdictional characteristics.

Respondent and agency characteristics of the survey sample are summarized on pages 2-4 in the initial survey results report available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/249189.pdf>. The final sample included representation from 49 states (all states with the exception of Hawaii), and from the District of Columbia. 60.0% of the survey sample came from local police departments, 39.3% from county sheriffs, and the remainder (<1%) from other types of agencies including state law enforcement agencies. Respondents were fairly evenly divided among senior agency command staff (34.9% of the sample), line-level commanders and supervisors (29.8%), and line-level staff (35.3% total, consisting of 26.6% uniform and 8.7% civilian).

The initial survey results report, issued in August of 2015, provided the tabulated statistics for the survey's structured items. ***This report presents the results of the survey's unstructured (open-response) items, particularly those related to law enforcement recommendations related to policy priorities.*** The first peer-reviewed analysis and discussion of survey results was published online ahead of print in *Criminal Justice Policy Review* in June 2016, and is available at this link

<http://bit.ly/2995gff> or from the Principal Investigator by request.<sup>1</sup> Additional topical analyses drawing from interview and survey data, as well as a Project Summary furnished to NIJ reflecting the major findings from the broader study, are under review at the time of this report. Updates on these and other project outputs are also available from the Principal Investigator.

The Phase 1 interviews reflected diverse perspectives on how policies governing SORN systems and related strategies might be most effectively calibrated. Based on interview data, the research team identified 16 commonly-referenced policy reform proposals, which fell into four broad categories: 1) enforcement and compliance; 2) operational improvements; 3) offender management; and 4) public-focused strategies. Survey respondents were presented with each of the 16 proposals in randomized order, and asked to categorize each as a high, medium, or low priority. After ranking these proposals, respondents were provided with a pair of open-ended prompts eliciting additional thoughts about priorities for policymakers – these responses are summarized in this report.

Aggregated rankings of the 16 policy proposals may be found on page 28 of the August 2015 survey results report, with additional analyses (comparing the perspectives of agency leadership, uniformed line personnel, and civilian registry personnel) included as part of the article in *Criminal Justice Policy Review*. Results are briefly summarized below:

**ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE.** Policies related to enforcement and compliance category included two of the three top-ranked priorities, namely expanded penalties for SORN non-compliance and expanded prosecution of registrant non-compliance. This finding is consistent with sentiments commonly expressed by registry compliance personnel in the interviews that their efforts are often undermined by insufficient follow-up at the prosecution phase. Of note, the expansion of in-person verification requirements – a significant element in the SORNA standards -- were placed comparatively low in their policy priority rankings.

**OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS.** Comparatively, policies related to operational improvements were generally deemed across the sample to be moderate to high priorities. Within this category, respondents placed the highest level of priority on policies and strategies to improve integration and inter-operability between SORN and other criminal justice and government information systems, followed by measures to improve registry accuracy and reliability, and to improve systems of registrant classification so that compliance efforts could be more effectively targeted. Policy initiatives to promote inter-agency collaboration were significantly more important to line personnel (uniform and civilian) than to agency leaders.

**OFFENDER MANAGEMENT.** The expansion of formal probation and parole supervision for registrants was designated as the single highest policy priority among survey participants across all categories. Results surrounding the other two items were somewhat mixed, with civilian registry personnel

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<sup>1</sup> Harris, A.J., Levenson, J.S., Lobanov-Rostovsky, C., and Walfield, S. (2016). Law Enforcement Perspectives on Sex Offender Registration & Notification: Effectiveness, Challenges, and Policy Priorities. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*. DOI 10.1177/0887403416651671

placing significantly more emphasis on strategies to address RSO homelessness and transience than either uniformed staff or agency leaders, and agency leadership expressing more concern than line staff over the need for strategies to redirect resources to higher risk offenders. Respondents converged in the sentiment that expanding community-based treatment for registrants should be given less policy emphasis.

**PUBLIC-FOCUSED STRATEGIES.** Taken in tandem, the items in this category ranked as lower priorities than those in other clusters. Overall, respondents across the sample deemed the two strategies related to improving the SORN's utility as a public information tool – campaigns to expand SORN utilization and modifications to make public SORN systems more accessible and user-friendly – as relatively low priorities. The highest ranking item in this category involved policy strategies focused on sexual violence prevention education for community members.

Building on these findings from the structured portion of this survey, this report summarizes the perspectives of survey respondents as captured through the accompanying open-ended response items.

For further information about this study, please contact Principal Investigator Andrew Harris (Andrew\_harris@uml.edu).

### **Acknowledgments**

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## DATA OVERVIEW

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The survey included a structured series of items asking respondents to evaluate a series of policy recommendations, and to indicate their views on which should take priority. Results from this battery of survey items are included in the main report. Following the structured items, respondents were presented with two open-ended prompts offering respondents the opportunity to offer supplemental recommendations to policymakers regarding sex offender registration and notification. These prompts were:

1. *Beyond the recommendations listed above, please indicate any other policy changes that you feel would have a significant impact on improving the public safety utility of sex offender registration and notification systems.*
2. *Considering your experiences with sex offender registration systems and with managing sex offenders within your jurisdiction, is there anything else that you would like to share that could be of assistance to state or federal policymakers?*

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## ANALYTIC PROCESS

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Of the 1239 respondents who completed the final battery of recommendation items, 263 offered responses to at least one of the above prompts.

All data were reviewed and independently coded by two research assistants, under the supervision of the project's Principal Investigator, with the assistance of NVivo data analysis software. Based on an initial review of all responses between the PI and the coding team, nine broad thematic categories were identified within the data. These included recommendations related to:

1. Registry Enforcement
2. Registry Requirements
3. Technical Administration and System Design
4. Agency Responsibility and Collaboration
5. Extent and Quality of Registry Information
6. Prosecution and Punishment of Sex Crimes
7. Public Education and Engagement
8. Restrictions Tied to Registration
9. Use of Empirical Research

The initial reviews also identified a small number of responses (4 in total) in which respondents suggested that no further policy changes were needed.

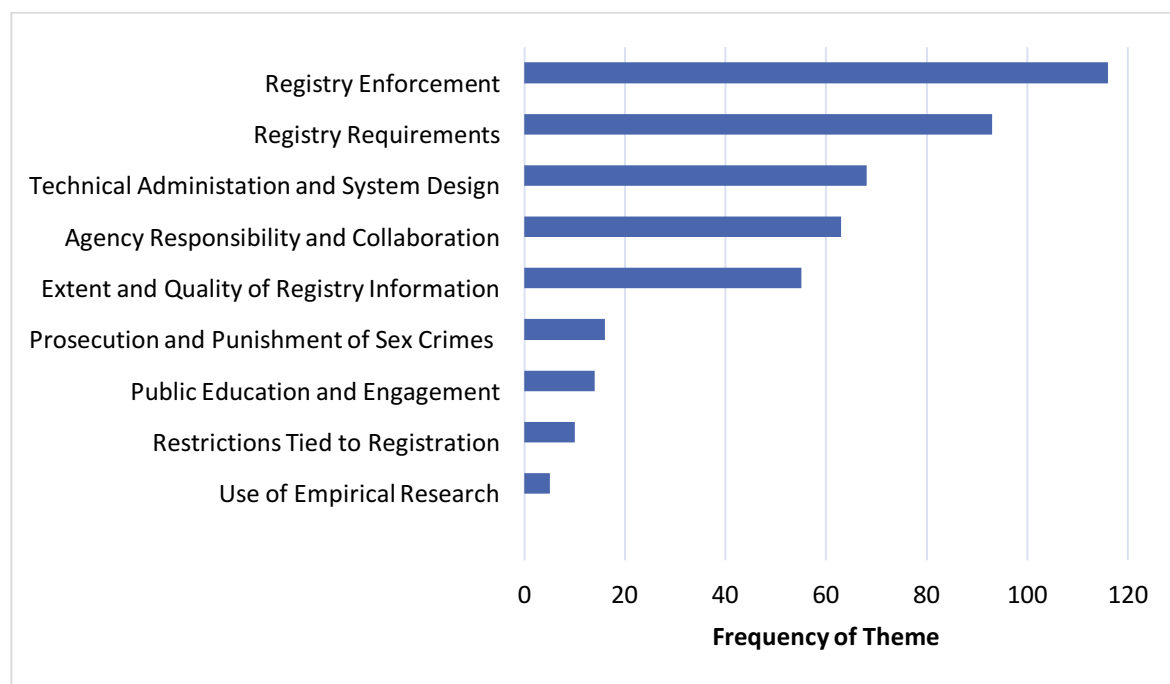
Using these nine themes as a foundation, all open-ended responses were independently coded by each of the two coders, and results were compared to ensure inter-rater reliability. Following reconciliation of this initial high-level coding, the coding team worked jointly to identify sub-themes within each of the nine categories, reflecting more specific policy and practice recommendations.

We begin this report with a high-level overview of the relative weight given to each of the parent themes. Following this, each parent theme is briefly discussed and presented, followed by presentation of the relevant sub-themes and illustrative examples for each.

## SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATION THEMES

The table and figure below present the overall and relative frequencies across the nine broad recommendation categories. The table's first two columns represent the overall number of submitted recommendations in that category, and the percentage of all recommendations comprised by that category. The third column indicates the number of unique respondents who submitted one or more recommendations falling into that category. The bar chart below offers a visual representation of the data presented in the first column.

	Mentions	% of Mentions	Unique Respondents
Registry Enforcement	116	26	104
Registry Requirements	93	21	84
Technical Administration and System Design	68	15	63
Agency Responsibility and Collaboration	63	14	54
Extent and Quality of Registry Information	55	13	51
Prosecution and Punishment of Sex Crimes	16	4	16
Public Education and Engagement	14	3	14
Restrictions Tied to Registration	10	2	10
Use of Empirical Research	5	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>440</b>		

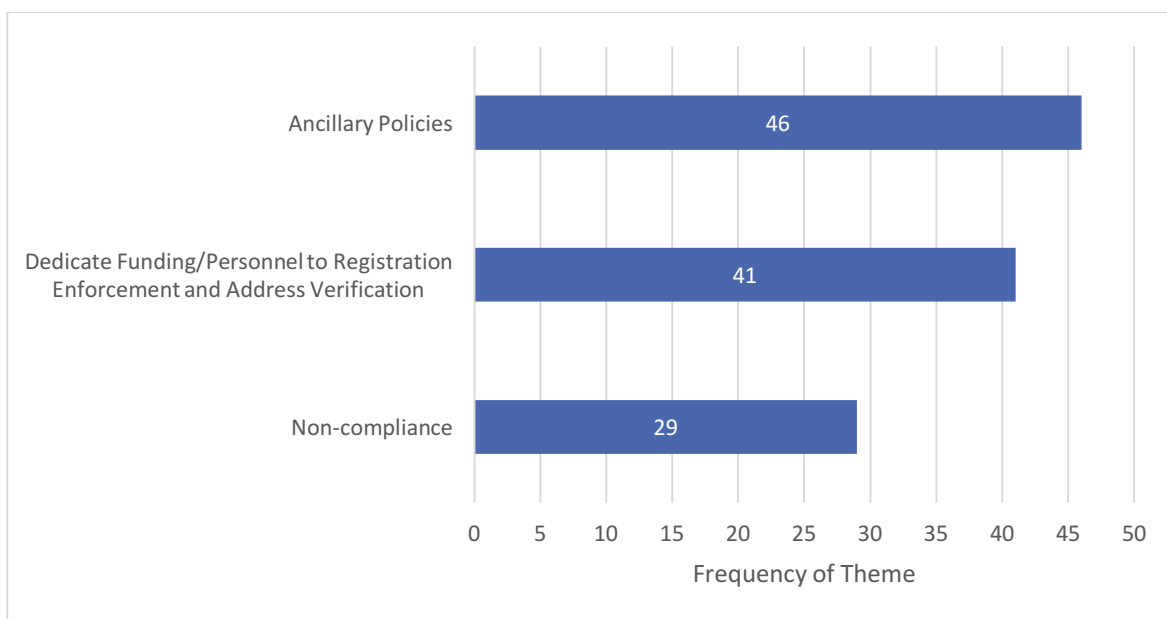


## THEMES, SUB-THEMES, AND EXAMPLES

### REGISTRY ENFORCEMENT

Of the recommendations provided by survey respondents, 26% fell under the broad theme of policies focused on registry enforcement. This theme was referenced 116 times, by 104 unique respondents, or 40% of those who submitted supplemental recommendations.

Analysis revealed three main sub-themes within this area: 1) the addition of ancillary policies designed specifically for registered sex offenders; 2) dedication of funding or personnel to registration enforcement and address verification; and 3) increased focus on non-compliance enforcement. The relative frequencies of these themes are reflected in the chart below.



#### ANCILLARY POLICIES

The development of ancillary policies designed to augment SORN was the most prevalent sub-theme offered by respondents. A total of 40% of recommendations within the registry enforcement theme centered on the development of ancillary policies around issues such as sex offender transience and homelessness, GPS monitoring of registered sex offender (RSO) movement, and enhanced capacity to monitor RSO online activity.

A New York police officer suggested that homelessness was the greatest challenge facing enforcement of sex offender registration.

*“The biggest challenge I have faced in the 5 years I have supervised the SO's in our city is managing the homeless population. It is virtually impossible to prove or disprove that they are actually homeless. Many in fact do live somewhere but have realized we cannot prove that they are not homeless, so they get away with it.”*



Electronic monitoring was also suggested as a way to track the movement of offenders, especially those offenders listed as homeless in the registry. A supervisor at a county sheriff's office in Tennessee suggested that homeless offenders should be required to wear electronic monitors.

*"I would like to see that any Sex Offender that registers as being homeless is immediately required to wear a GPS ankle bracelet. This person should be monitored on a 24 hour a day basis, to watch and keep up with their movement. Today this is not required, and some Sex Offenders claim to be homeless and report in once a month. This way they live where they want to live and we have no idea where they are spending the night."*

Citing potential access to victims that may be facilitated through mobile devices and computers, several respondents indicated that these methods of communication should be closely monitored for registered sex offenders. A Sheriff's officer in Florida suggested

*"Cell phones- I can track my kids using there [sic] cell phones, even to the point of being alerted when the get to school. Development of an mobile application [sic] that sexual offenders/predators would have to have on those offenders that have cell phones. Offender computers should be routed through a law enforcement router."*

These sentiments were echoed by a New Hampshire police officer who noted a lack of resources made it difficult to track the online activity of sex offenders.

*"I believe the most crucial threat is the online threat. It is very difficult to monitor offenders online activity [sic]. Not enough resources are being used to conduct online compliance and threat assessment."*

A civilian staff member at a police department in Colorado cited the need for policies to reduce redundancies occurring in the registration system when RSOs move from one location to another:

*"There must be a better way to track when an offender moves. At the present time, unless a sister agency lets us know that one of our offenders has moved into their jurisdiction, we have no way of knowing we should remove him from our records. Offenders should be required to de-register from one agency before moving to the next. Right now, the state of Colorado only requires offenders to deregister if they are leaving the state."*

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## DEDICATE FUNDING/PERSONNEL TO REGISTRY ENFORCEMENT AND VERIFICATION

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The second most common sub-theme, comprising 35% of recommendations in this category, focused on dedicating funding and personnel to registry enforcement and address verification. Respondents noted that few resources were usually dedicated to sex offender registration generally, and even fewer were allotted for law enforcement officers to conduct address verification.

A county sheriff's officer in Florida noted that as the number of registered sex offenders increases, the manpower and resources dedicated to address verification does not increase.

*"Laws are passed frequently in attempts to make community feel safer, typically there is no increase in funding or manpower to manage the new requirements for this population. This population increases daily along with new requirements (laws)in addition additional"*

*responsibilities are assigned but manpower has not increased. Increase manpower to appropriate levels to manage and track population.”*

A police officer in Texas had similar comments, explaining,

*“The funding needed for specialized enforcement and management of the sex offender registration and notification systems would allow law enforcement to focus more time and manpower to this issue. We currently do not have the time allotted for a specialized officer to enforce the registration and notification requirements as of this time. Funding for this specialty would allow this area to be address with the attention it deserves.”*

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## ADDRESSING NON-COMPLIANCE

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The remaining 25% of recommendations in this category pertained to non-compliance and how RSOs who are non-compliant with registration requirements should be managed. These recommendations often centered on the belief that non-compliance was not adequately addressed by prosecutors, and there needed to be more aggressive prosecution of non-compliance and increased penalties for non-compliant offenders.

A civilian staff member at a police department in Arizona noted that

*“Offenders failing to register should be sentenced to a mandatory 10 years in prison, no parole. Prosecutors must be tougher and more consistent in sentencing.”*

Of note, this sentiment that cases of registry non-compliance are often not sufficiently prosecuted was also among the leading areas of concern cited throughout the survey’s structured items.

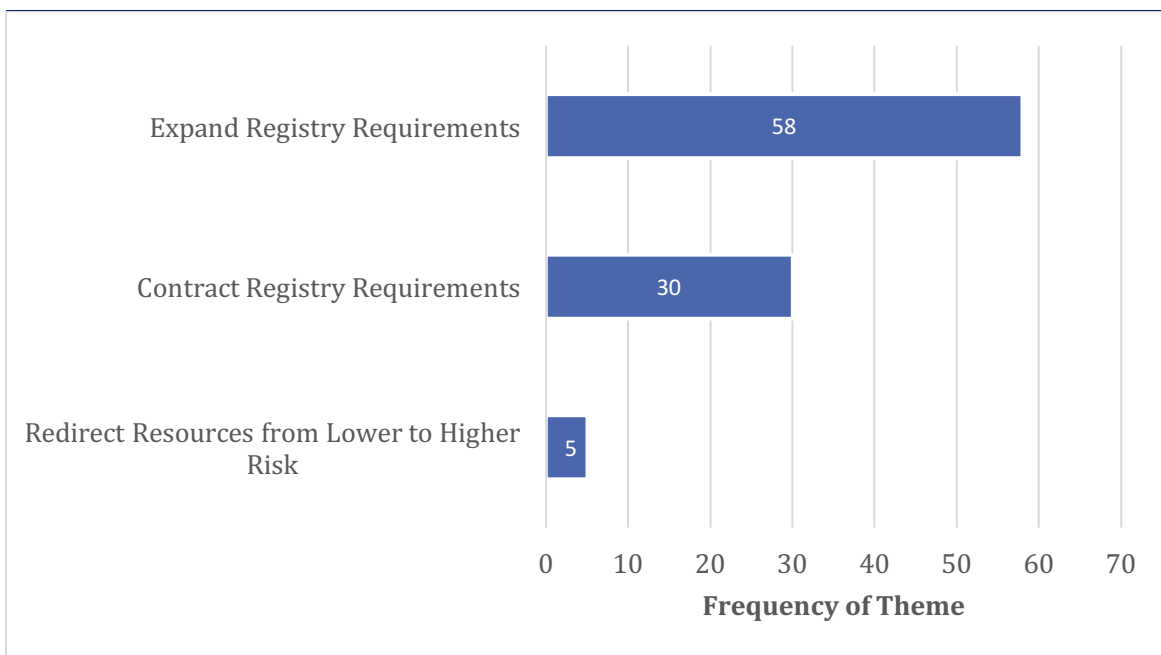
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## REGISTRY REQUIREMENTS

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The second most common category of recommendations involved adjustments to statutory and regulatory requirements placed upon RSOs, and on calibrating those responses relative to sex offender risk. This theme was referenced 93 times, by 84 unique respondents, or 32% of those who submitted supplemental recommendations.

Analysis revealed three main sub-themes within this area: 1) recommendations pertaining to expanding the registry requirements for registrants; 2) recommendations suggesting contracting the registry requirements for some registrants; and 3) redirecting resources from lower risk to higher risk offenders. The relative frequencies of these themes are reflected in the chart below.



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#### EXPAND REGISTRY REQUIREMENTS

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The expansion of registry requirements was the most common sub-theme within this category. A total of 62% of recommendations within the registry requirements theme suggested the expansion of registration requirements as a needed change to the current SORN system.

A Deputy Sheriff in Indiana suggested that offenders convicted of sex crimes prior to the passage of SORN should still be required to register, noting:

*“There are two States that have ex-post facto rulings that prohibit registration of offenders who committed their offense prior to registration laws being implemented. That means we have convicted offenders who are dangerous that are no longer required to register. Federal law should insist they register as federal offenders even if the Marshal Service has to be tasked with that requirement.”*

A police officer in Florida suggested that determinations of risk should be based on the offender and their offense, not solely on a designation of Predator that is not necessarily based on their risk of recidivating.

*“In my state, community notification is only required for the status of Predator. However, when we conduct threat assessments on offenders that move into our community and become part of our Sex Offender Monitoring Program, we find that the crimes and risk associated with offenders are quite often as egregious as those of Predators. The status of offender should be no less concerning to law enforcement and the public than the status of Predator.”*

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## CONTRACT REGISTRY REQUIREMENTS

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32% of recommendations in this area focused on contracting registry requirements through processes such as deregistration and narrowing the list of sex crimes requiring registration. Some of these recommendations suggested that registration should not be extended to all sex crimes, but only those offenses that suggest an offender actually poses a threat to society.

A line supervisor at a County Sheriff's Office in Iowa suggested that offenders convicted of sex crimes should be reassessed before leaving prison to determine if they actually warranted registration.

*"Truth in sentencing for convictions in sex offenses. It seems as if we give them probation and then require them to register. If the offense is truly serious make them do time in prison. Don't give them probation and then require them to be subjected to public humiliation by making them and their crimes know to everyone. During the prison sentence they can be evaluated and risk assessment done on whether or not they are likely to re-offend. If they are likely to re-offend then they should be placed on the registry. If not they should not be required. The sex offender registry creates a fear of a person who might not actually ever commit a sex crime again. It makes it very hard for them to re-integrate into society and without the re-integration they will be more likely to commit another crime. The idea that a restriction of 2000 feet will prevent someone from re-offending is ridiculous."*

A police investigator in New York suggested that certain crimes, such as consensual sex offenses, should not be required to register because individuals convicted of these crimes do not necessarily pose a danger to society.

*"Certain crimes that result in a person classified as a sex offender could be eliminated as they are misleading to the community. Ex. patronizing a prostitute unless under age, consensual sex offenses that are due to age and in which the parties are within a certain age difference."*

An Arkansas County Sheriff noted that the registries were not effective in reducing sex crimes and could actually hinder the apprehension of individuals committing sex crimes in the community. He noted

*"I would say that in my opinion 95% of the SORN is a waste of tax money in small counties like mine where everybody already knows who the real threats are. Registering just makes one drive to another area to commit his crimes. It also opens the door for someone who has not been caught an opportunity to commit a sex crime in the registrants location because everybody in the neighborhood will naturally think the registered sex offender did it."*

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## REDIRECT RESOURCES FROM LOWER TO HIGHER RISK

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Related to the themes of expanding or contracting requirements, some recommendations in this category emphasized redirecting emphasis from lower risk offenders on the registry to higher risk offenders. For example, a detective in Texas noted that focusing attention on low risk offenders could create undue concern among community members, noting

*“I think it's crucial to focus the bulk of our attention on the high-risk group and to try to avoid needlessly alarming the public about a member of the low-risk group who might not actually be a threat to the greater public.”*

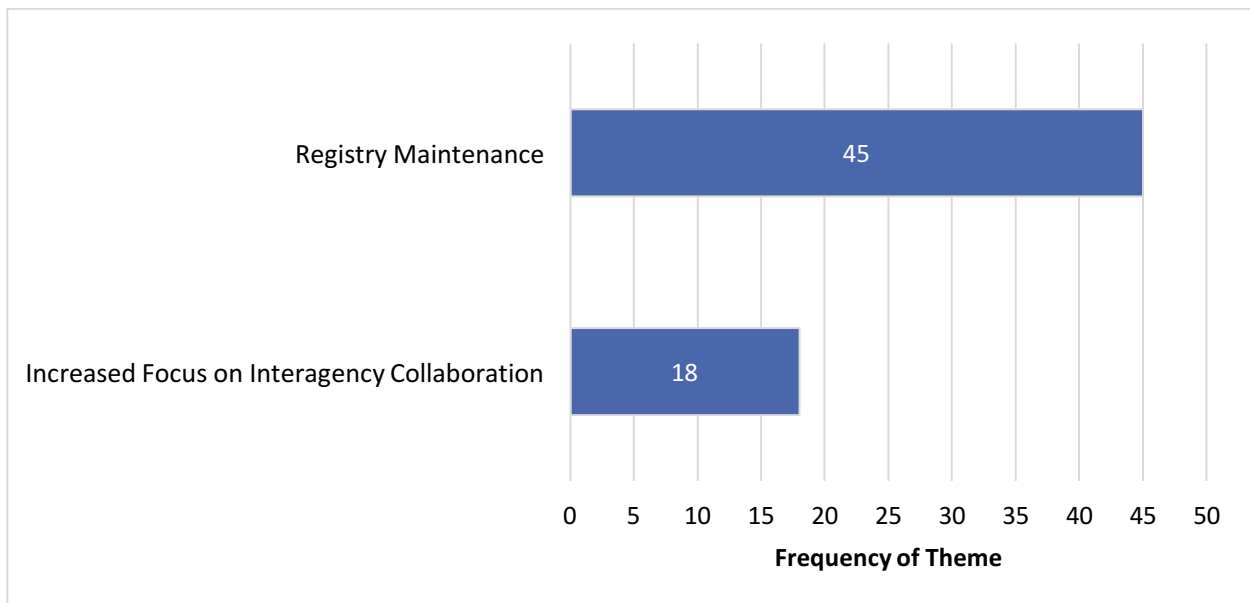
A police officer in Connecticut echoed similar sentiments when he stated

*“I understand very clearly why the registry was created and support its cause to keep sexual predators on the radar of the public for their safety, but in all honesty, heroin addicts are far more likely to re-offend and commit dozens of crimes against those who live in the area around them for years and years. Alerting the public to low risk sexual offenders defeats the purpose of the registry. Keep the registry for those 5% high risk offenders, those who pose an actual threat to the public, and leave the other 95% on a law enforcement accessible version of the site.”*

## AGENCY RESPONSIBILITY AND COLLABORATION

This theme encompassed recommendations related to who should be responsible for SORN system operation, as well as those related to increasing interagency collaboration and public engagement with registries. This theme was referenced 77 times, by 68 unique respondents, or 26% of those who submitted supplemental recommendations.

Analysis revealed two main sub-themes within this area: 1) responsibility for registry maintenance; and 2) expanded interagency collaboration on sex offender management.



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## RESPONSIBILITY FOR REGISTRY MANAGEMENT

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71% of recommendations within the category focused on themes related to responsibility for registry maintenance and registration-specific training for law enforcement officers charged with registry maintenance and enforcement.

Many respondents felt that local law enforcement should not be responsible for maintaining sex offender registries, suggesting that the function would be better filled by state police or by probation or parole agencies. A police officer from New Hampshire stated:

*“Instead of mandating local agencies, especially those barely surviving with minimal manpower, have ALL offenders register at strategic locations throughout the state. These locations could be the county sheriff’s office, the regional probation/parole office, or the closest state police barracks. The registry is run by the NH State Police and should be handled by such in which each jurisdiction would receive notification. If an offender is non-compliant, then the local agency would receive that notification and complete the warrant.”*

Similarly, a police officer from Michigan suggested that probation or parole agencies may be better suited to maintain sex offender registries and enforce registration laws:

*“Insofar [sic] as I’m concerned SORN registrations have no business being done by police departments. These are time consuming, resource killers and like every other mandate are unfunded taking resources from day to day operational issues. The Probation and Parole Divisions should be required to operate SOR.”*

Several respondents indicated that maintaining sex offender registration was an important function for law enforcement, but noted that their agencies did not receive dedicated officers to carry out these tasks. A sheriff’s deputy in Indiana noted:

*“Individual Law Enforcement Agencies need to recognize that Sex Offender Registration is an important function within the agency and needs to be staffed with qualified individuals whose primary focus is making sure that sex offenders register, comply with the rules and are charged with registration violations when required.”*

Respondents also noted that law enforcement officers could benefit from registration specific training. A police investigator in Connecticut noted that this type of training should occur because it would enhance the ability of law enforcement to execute SORN.

*“Sex offender registry policy should provide timely necessary training that allows local agencies access to all available offender registry information and known contacts. This may require a policy change in the frequency in which this training is offered to allow total access to local agencies.”*

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## INCREASED FOCUS ON INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

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This sub-theme, encompassing 29% of recommendations in the category, emphasized the need for increased focus on interagency collaboration related to sex offender management. Specifically, respondents emphasized that SORN would be more effective, and local agencies would be strained less, through enhanced collaboration across local, state, and federal agencies.

The importance of law enforcement at all levels working together was mentioned by a police officer in Texas when he stated:

*“I just feel that local, state, and federal agencies should work closer when it comes to the enforcement of sex offender regulations.”*

A leader at a police department in Massachusetts stressed the need for funding for interagency task forces focused on sex offender management, noting:

*“Local Law Enforcement is where the rubber meets the road on this issue. We need more funding (\$\$\$) so that we can do local and regional compliance task forces. What is costly for one agency to achieve is financially feasible when several agencies regionalize to share cost and enforcement.”*

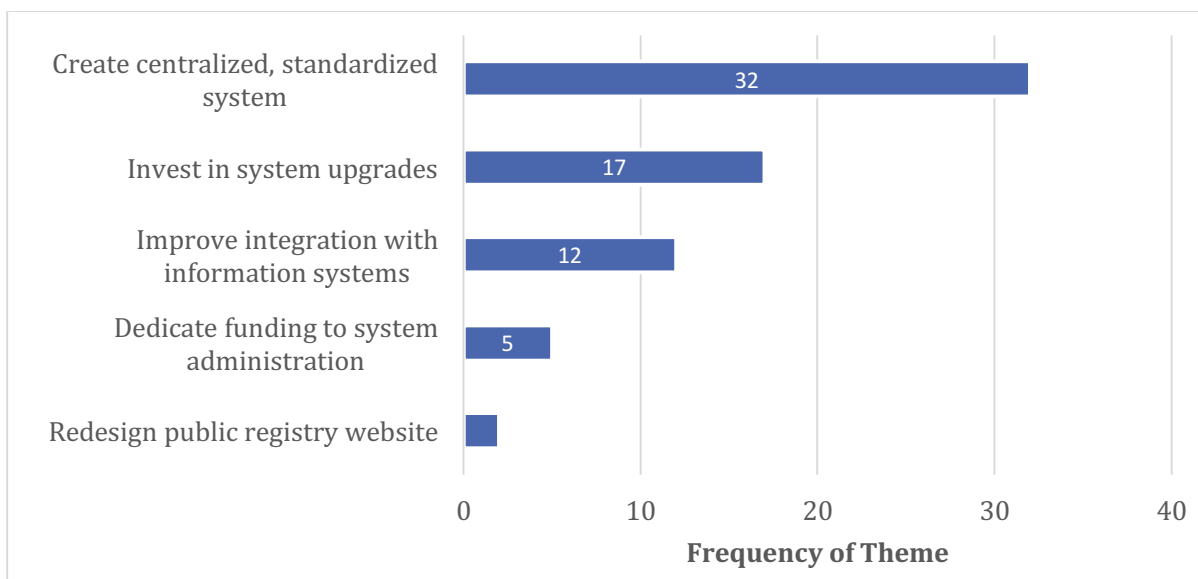
Related to interagency collaboration, some respondents cited the potential role of interagency task forces. One police officer in Texas who suggested that task forces similar to those used for drug enforcement could be helpful for SORN enforcement:

*“Establishing regional task forces of local and county law enforcement agencies allowing SORN information to be shared in the same manner as drug enforcement is conducted.”*

## TECHNICAL ADMINISTRATION AND SYSTEM DESIGN

The technical administration and system design theme applied to recommendations that referred directly to the software or technology used for managing and operating state sex offender registries. This theme was referenced 68 times, by 63 unique respondents, or 24% of those who submitted supplemental recommendations.

Analysis revealed 5 main sub-themes within this area: 1) investment in system upgrades; 2) improved integration with other information systems; 3) redesigning of the public registry to make information more accessible; 4) improving centralization and consistency of registration system across the 50 states; and 5) dedication of more funding to registry system administration.



### CREATE CENTRALIZED, STANDARDIZED SYSTEM

The most commonly cited sub-theme in this category, comprising 47% of recommendations in the category, emphasized the need for creation of a centralized, consistent registration system across states and other jurisdictions. These recommendations tended to emphasize the need to close “loopholes” that might otherwise make it easier for registered sex offenders to move from one state to another to avoid registration requirements. For example, a municipal police department civilian staff member in Arizona stated:

*“As mentioned before, there is a need for consistency in the assessment, registration and notification system across the US; Offender Watch or something comparable is a good start. There would be no 'safe zone' for higher risk sex offenders if each state were on the same page.”*

Another respondent, a civilian staff member at a police department in Rhode Island, suggested that a standardized system could help make re-registration for offenders moving from one jurisdiction to another easier for law enforcement, noting that:

*“A standardized system of registry would be helpful. Many of our offenders move in and out of*



*our jurisdiction frequently, and they must register/unregister each time. Although the department registration policies are reviewed on an annual basis by the State unit, when multiple jurisdictions are using their own policy and registration methodology (forms/hours/days/etc.) the process can be confusing to both law enforcement and the offender”.*

Of note, this theme of system centralization was also tied to themes related to the demand for uniform means of offender classification. As noted by a New York Sheriff:

*“Too often I see the difference between a level one and a level 3 is the price of a good attorney. That is unacceptable. One classification, one set of rules, one software product. That will greatly improve the system.”*

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### INVEST IN SYSTEM UPGRADES

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The second most common sub-theme, comprising 25% of recommendations in this category, focused on investing in system upgrades, including the use of more advanced technology and software. One police office in Texas noted that their system, as it was currently implemented, was a strain on the officers and the department’s resources because of the lack of technology used, noting:

*“Our system consists of verifying/updating the registrant online, printing out the forms for him/her to sign, and storing the signed paperwork in a file. A file system on line with a signature capability would be much more streamlined and save paper/space.”*

Another police officer in Delaware noted that he had come across a more advanced technology that could allow offenders to update their information in the community. However, funding required to purchase this technology was lacking.

*“I have explored a kiosk unit that could be positioned around our state to assist Sex Offenders with verification or updating information. This would lessen the burden on individuals who are compliant. However, funding for such an item is not currently available.”*

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### IMPROVE INTEGRATION WITH OTHER INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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Another sub-theme, encompassing 18% of recommendations in the category, emphasized integration of sex offender registries with other information systems, including criminal history records, registry of motor vehicle records, and social service records.

One respondent, a police officer in Wisconsin, noted that a lack of integration between state and federal registries caused delays in enforcement of SORN,

*“There is an information void between the federal CJ system for sex offenders and the State System for Sex Offenders. Fed system is awfully slow and behind in tracking, updating, and notifying local Law Enf [sic] when offenders are placed in communities.”*

Additionally, a police officer from Massachusetts suggested that sex offender registries should be integrated with other systems to facilitate the ability of law enforcement officers to find offenders

who failed to register. He explained

*“The systems used to locate sex offenders in violation should go beyond the law enforcement community and into the public resources domain. IE Food stamps, EBT, etc. [sic] With easily accessible integration into those systems, finding sex offenders in violation would be much better facilitated.”*

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#### DEDICATE FUNDING TO SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION

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Five responses in this category (7%) called for increasing the amount of funding related specifically to the administration of sex offender registries. These recommendations advocated for funds for registry databases and training for those officers charged with maintaining registry databases.

A police officer in Michigan noted the need for funds designated specifically to equipment for sex offender registries and officers tasked with SORN.

*“If individual policing agencies are going to be continually tasked then money earmarked for it should be allocated to cover staffing and equipment. This shouldn't be a grant or anything along that lines [sic], those funds should be derived from Offenders in the jurisdiction proportionally. Again individual communities are forced to divert resources to these unfunded mandates, just as the plethora of other unfunded mandates.”*

A police officer in Tennessee noted that funding aimed at training those individuals responsible for maintaining sex offender registries was needed. He explained:

*“Funding and training for the person who is going to maintain the records of these offenders depending on who they are either law enforcement or public civil service worker.”*

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#### REDESIGN THE PUBLIC REGISTRY WEBSITE

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Less common within the data were recommendations suggesting that the public registry should be redesigned to make the information more accessible to members of the community. A police officer in New Hampshire explained that because of the current design of the New Hampshire registry, it was often difficult for the public to locate it online, stating that:

*“Consistency, and for the NH system, making the NH State Registry easier to find when doing a general online search. It can be difficult to find if you don't know what you're looking for, which is bad for the general public accessibility. You have to search for NH criminal offenders, not NH sex offenders, in order to find the site, which the general public would not know.”*

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## EXTENT AND QUALITY OF REGISTRY INFORMATION

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Respondents also offered recommendations pertaining to the quality and amount of information contained on sex offender registries. This theme was referenced 55 times, by 51 unique respondents, or 19% of those who submitted supplemental recommendations.

Analysis revealed 2 main sub-themes within this area: 1) accuracy and consistency of registry information; and 2) the extent of information about registrants available on the registry.

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### ACCURACY AND CONSISTENCY

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Approximately half (51%) of the recommendations within this category focused on ways to increase the accuracy and consistency of registry information. Many respondents indicated that having a way to update and verify the information contained on registries would greatly improve the enforcement of SORN. A police officer from Indiana noted:

*“The purpose of the sex offender registry is to have a clearing house for sex offenders' names and residences. Without verifying the accuracy of the information on a regular basis, the registry becomes unreliable and it's [sic] value is diluted.”*

A County Sheriff's officer in North Carolina mentioned that compliance checks would help to ensure accurate information.

*“I believe that all County's across NC should have regular compliance checks on the Sex Offenders in their area. I wish the prison system was required to contact the agency to where the Sex Offender will be residing. I wish each department would communicate better especially out of state.”*

Other suggested that consistency in what offenses are required to register and the length of registration required would also improve the accuracy of information contained on registries. An officer at a County Sheriff's office in Maryland explained:

*“All states have different laws that may require or not require a convicted offender to register as a sex offender. With so many different laws and different classifications it is very difficult to understand what Tier someone should be classified. I have had cases where they have finished their registry requirement in my state, however if they move to another state they would be classified a different Tier and would have to continue their registration.”*

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### EXTENT OF REGISTRANT INFORMATION

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The other half of recommendations in this category focused on increasing or decreasing the amount and type of information about registered sex offenders contained on registries. Some recommendations focused on increasing the amount of information about offenders and their offenses contained on registries, and increasing the information made available to the public. A police officer from North Carolina thought registries should include more information about the type of victims an offender targeted to help dispel beliefs that all offenders on the registry target children.

*"I feel that the classification system should be adjusted to show adult sexual offenders and those who are pedophiles. The general public sees all sex offender registrants as pedophiles. I realize that adult offenders are dangerous as well but we need to be aware of who is offending our children so that we can be more aware of who is in the community."*

Similarly, a police officer from Connecticut suggested that more information about the offender's offense should be listed so that the public could more accurately judge how concerned they should be about specific offenders in their community.

*"The registry was designed to protect the public from sexual predators. If it is not possible to classify offenders on the registry based upon risk, then a brief synopsis of the crime, even if only one or two sentences, would be vastly helpful in allowing the public to recognize what the danger level is for that offender."*

Recommendations about the type of information contained on registries were not limited to information about the offenders and the offense, but also information about the offender's likelihood of recidivating. A police officer in Florida suggested psychiatric evaluations should be conducted to help determine risk levels for registered offenders.

*"An in-depth psychiatric evaluation should be done for each sex offender and that information disseminated to Law Enforcement Agencies as to the percentage amount that the sex offender is likely to commit a sexual offence again."*

While not a popular recommendation, a line supervisor from a county sheriff's office suggested that the public should not have access to information on registered sex offenders and this information should only be used by law enforcement, stating: *"Keep registration out of the public areas."*

## **PROSECUTION AND PUNISHMENT OF SEX CRIMES**

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This relatively limited group of recommendations (16 mentioned, 4% of recommendations) encompassed those related to the need for harsher penalties and/or more standardized prosecution of sex crimes. Many of the responses from law enforcement officers indicated that the sentences available for sex crimes were not severe enough, or that registration was not being effectively enforced by the courts.

A police detective in Oklahoma believed sentences for sex offenders should be harsher, noting:

*"I believe that holding our Judicial Officials accountable for the sentencing of sex offenders and violators of SORNA should be a high priority. Our District Attorney's and Assistant US Attorney's should push for longer sentencing of sex offenders and unregistered sex offenders. They are too passive."*

A civilian staff member at a county police department in Alabama thought that prosecutors and judges were not enforcing sex offender registration on offenders convicted of sex crimes.

*"We have judges in our area that are exempting Sex Offenders that are convicted of sex crimes and our Circuit Judge is exempting them from registering. We have contacted our local DA, Attorney General's Office, Marshall's and anyone else we could think of to get help with this matter and have been unable to get any help with this."*

## PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

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This category of recommendations focused on increasing public awareness of sex offender registries and public education about sexual violence and its prevention. Recommendations in this theme centered on investing in campaigns to increase public use of official internet sex offender registries and increasing public education with regard to sexual violence prevention. This theme was mentioned 14 times, by 14 respondents, or 5% of those who submitted recommendations.

The public's lack of awareness of sex offender registries was mentioned by several respondents as hindering the effectiveness of these registries. A police officer in New Hampshire explained:

*"I believe many people in the general public don't know that the sex offender registry exists. I personally get calls from people who have heard that an offender may be living in their neighborhood. They don't even know that the State registry exists. I tell them how to access the registry. Education for the general public on the existence of the registry and more transparency within the registry would make for a safer and better informed public populace."*

Several respondents also noted that the general public was often uneducated on sexual offending, sex offenders, and their likelihood for recidivism. A Sheriff's officer in Texas stated that because the public was uneducated on sexual offending and offenders, they usually had difficulty understanding sex offender registries.

*"Improve public awareness about sex offenders, their recidivism rates and actual crime in terms that are more easily understood. For example, in Texas, 'Indecency with a Child' is a felony offense, but invokes different meanings to different people that learn that a sex offender has been convicted of the offense. What the offender actually did to the child is left to the imagination or for the offender to give whatever explanation the offender chooses."*

A County Sheriffs officer in Minnesota had similar comments, explaining that because community members were unfamiliar with how sex offender registries categorized offenders into tiers or levels, they were more likely to be fearful of those offenders who were under the greatest amount of supervision.

*"Public education should be a high priority. I find that the public get upset when there is a level 3 moving into the community but they lack the information that there are so many offenders out there and that the level 3 are the most supervised and the other offender that are not level 3 do not have as much supervision and are in my opinion a much higher risk."*

## RESTRICTIONS TIED TO REGISTRATION

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Law enforcement respondents also provided recommendations pertaining to restrictions linked with sex offender registration (10 mentioned, 2% of recommendations). In this category, respondents provided recommendations suggesting how residence restrictions could be changed to make sex offender registration more effective. Analysis revealed 2 main sub-themes within this area: 1) recommendations pertaining to the expansion of registration restrictions, and 2) those pertaining to the contraction of residence restrictions for registered sex offenders.

Most of the recommendations (8 of the 10) suggested that residence restrictions should be expanded for registered sex offenders. A police officer in Texas suggested that registry restrictions should be expanded to include locations that a sex offender is not allowed to visit.

*“Have location/interaction restrictions on sex offenders. Texas does not currently restrict sex offenders residence locations, visiting locations, or social interaction and Texas should. The public is not aware that it is perfectly legal for a registered sex offender to attend school functions, playgrounds, day care facilities, and other such places. We receive such calls frequently and the reporting person is always amazed that a registered sex offender has the freedom to go places the general public believes they should be restricted from.”*

In contrast, some respondents suggested that restrictions tied to registration should actually be contracted for registrants. Some recommendations suggested that residence restrictions should be contracted, if not eliminated, because they either do not prevent offenders from recidivating or they prohibit offenders from finding places to live. A Sheriff’s Deputy in North Carolina noted that residence restrictions may not actually prevent an offender from gaining access to victims:

*“Better define the term residence. To many offenders who cannot live with relatives due to a daycare or school in the area, will obtain an address elsewhere but spend 99% of there [sic] time at the home of the relative, thus defeating the intended purpose of obtaining the other residence. Maybe get rid of the residence requirement altogether, or shorten the distance of a 1,000 feet to 500 feet thus opening up more liveable [sic] room. Point of interest; An offender can walk right up to a school and stand there all day, he just can't sleep with in a 1,000 feet?”*

while a Wisconsin County Sheriff suggested that residence restrictions infringed on the ability of offenders to live where they choose.

*“We need to eliminate the residency restrictions in many communities. A community should not be able to restrict an offender from living in the community they grew up in. This is happening in Wisconsin and is driving sex offenders underground and out of compliance.”*

## USE OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FOR SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT

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The final theme within the open-response data referred to the application of evidence to sex offender management policies. While relatively rare within the sample (5 mentions, 1% of all recommendations), these recommendations highlighted the need for policymakers to apply both empirically-derived evidence from researchers as well as experiential evidence gathered through criminal justice practitioners including law enforcement.

An officer from a sheriff's department in California expressed the need to base sex offender policies on empirical research on sex offenders.

*"With no room left in the jail or the prisons, the value of parole or probation is minimal, because the criminals know there is no real threat of punishment. With all the attention that SORN gets, is there any data indicating it makes any difference in preventing crime or solving new crimes? Some studies show the location of a suspect's residence has almost no value in predicting the next sex crime victim, because the victims are usually socially known to the suspect. The recidivism rate of sex criminals is known to be much LOWER than most other types of crime. While these facts are widely known, they are not recognized by the political systems which cause laws making it so urban areas to ban the offenders to rural areas, and destabilize offenders. Since other countries have lower sex crime rates than the USA, perhaps our nation should look elsewhere for alternative ways to manage sex offenses besides more registration efforts."*

A police supervisor in Georgia expressed a similar sentiment when he stated that:

*"State and federal policy makers have sufficient data (statistical and historical) available to make appropriate policy. They need the integrity and moral fiber to do so and need to compel the courts to enforce statutes already in place."*

Finally, respondents expressed the desire for policymakers to gather input from the law enforcement officers responsible for implementing sex offender registration. A sheriff deputy from South Carolina explained:

*"I feel that laws and policies are written and passed by lawmakers and state agency personnel with little or no input from the officers and departments that are required to enforce the laws or policies. Many things could be improved by listening to those who are intimately involved in the process. We seldom hear from legislators or policy makers prior to passing of legislation or policy."*