

Homeless advocates tell state: Keep high level sex offenders out of shelters

By Lane Lambert

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QUINCY - John Yazwinski meets with police in Quincy and Brockton every month to see how many high-level sex offenders are listing homeless shelters in those cities — Father Bill's Place in Quincy and MainSpring in Brockton — as their address.

The list is seldom more than a handful of names — and even then, most of the offenders aren't actually signing in for an overnight bed.

"They're using us as a way not to be found," said Yazwinski, who is executive director and the person in charge of both shelters on a day-to-day basis.

That is why he and scores of other providers for the homeless are backing a new proposal to ban Level 3 sex offenders — the most dangerous and most likely to repeat their crimes — from the shelters.

While they say offenders have a right to housing like everyone else, they also say shelters are not the proper place for them, especially at a time when sharp state budget cuts are straining overall programs for the homeless.

"We don't have the capability," Yazwinski said Wednesday. "We don't get paid for case management (for sex offenders). The only thing the state pays us to do is shelter people 12 hours a day."

Tom Washington, community relations director at the MainSpring shelter in Brockton, declined comment Wednesday, deferring to Yazwinski.

Gov. Deval Patrick's administration has cut \$2.7 million from funding that pays much of the cost for beds for individual adults at Father Bill's, MainSpring and other shelters.

Homeless advocates say that 7 percent cut is effectively 15 percent, since the state fiscal year is almost half over, so the impact is much worse.

The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, which includes some 90 shelters and service providers, is supporting a bill by state Sen. Walter Timilty, D-Walpole.

Joe Finn, the alliance's director, said the bill will help close a loophole in the state's Sex Offender Registry, by forcing offenders to be truthful about their residence.

“The state has no idea where these guys are,” said Finn, who is also a Quincy city councilor. “That defeats the purpose of the registry.”

At the same time, Yazwinski said, sexual offenders are returning to their communities from prison with no resources and support.

“We’re not the place for these people to end up,” he said.

Timilty’s proposal comes at a time when a growing number of towns and cities are restricting sex offenders from living near schools, parks, playgrounds, day care centers, libraries and senior centers.

Weymouth, Rockland and Pembroke have passed such bans. Quincy and Plymouth are considering them.

Civil liberties advocates say such restrictions in effect pile extra punishment on offenders, while a shelter exclusion would further remove them from contact.

“Nobody thinks these guys should be on the street,” countered Finn. “But they shouldn’t be in shelters to begin with.”

Yazwinski agreed with Finn that the state needs to take greater responsibility to find places for offenders to stay.

But even so, Yazwinski said the number of Level 3 offenders who even list Father Bill’s or MainSpring as their address is a small fraction of all the offenders who live south of Boston.

Enterprise staff writer Elaine Allegrini contributed to this report.

http://www.wickedlocal.com/brockton/news/police_and_fire/x381220564/Homeless-advocates-tell-state-Keep-high-level-sex-offenders-out-of-shelters