May 12, 2020

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Shawn Barrera-Leaf and I am a current taxpaying resident of Grand Traverse County in a small community called Williamsburg. My husband and I raised our two sons here as we felt this was a community that represented our values that we held as priority, a good place to start our family roots. Never would I have dreamed after raising my family here, that I would be corresponding to my State Judiciary committee to express my opposition to HB5679. Additionally, never would I imagine that by sharing our family's story I would be fighting for my son's rights who was born and raised here in Michigan, in this community where we chose to call home, in this country were I thought Justice prevailed.

My son's story begins on August 30, 2017 and continues to this date. My son has been convicted of a sex offense and is currently incarcerated in a state jail. Prior to this dramatically impactful event, my son was on his way to fulfill his life time dream of becoming a Medical Physician as well as a contributing member of society. We thought "life was good". Unfortunately, as with most cases of sexual assault, we learned that my son was also sexually abused numerous times over the span of 6 years. My son now carries two labels: Sex Offender, and Sexual Assault Survivor. Now we feel "life is not good."

As a family we vowed to support him through this life changing event and began educating ourselves with what he will face once he pays his debt to society. Much to our dismay, we learned about the Michigan Sex Registry and SORA. This law is very complex and difficult to understand, along with its numerous, onerous, intrusive restrictions. One would think that a person has no rights in a state and country that praises its freedom. The absurdity that my son after paying his debt to society and successfully reentering will be placed on a public registry, jeopardizing his safety, his family's safety and not being able to move back to his childhood home because we live in a "school zone" is beyond maddening. Although I could go on with all the restrictions, this Bill HB5679 does nothing to change them and allow the registrants to live a successful life. It is punishment and not productive. The pretense that it's used for public safety is very frustrating as this does nothing of the sort. Studies have determined that most sexual offenses happen between familiar relationships, and that Stranger Danger is not the case. (Case in point, my son's offenders were "friends") To further the disappointment, the current Registry does not allow most to graduate off. It's relaying the message, "too bad, the one mistake you made will define you for the rest of your life". How is that rehabilitative?. Again HB5679 does nothing to address these issues. I leave you with this question, "How would you feel if your loved one faced this on a daily basis?"

Members of the House Judiciary Committee thank you for your time, and I pray you will take my written testimony into consideration in opposition of HB5679.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawn Barrera-Leaf

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