



## Jack Wagner, Auditor General Special Report

June 22, 2010

# Pa. Auditor General gives C- to state's Internet registry for sex offenders; says it's improved but still not making the grade

**I**ntroduction. The Pennsylvania Megan's Law website is better than before but still has problems with accuracy and usefulness, says state Auditor General Jack Wagner.

At [www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us](http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us), the site lists profiles for more than 10,000 convicted sex offenders.

According to Megan's Law, "public safety will be enhanced by making information about sexually violent predators, lifetime registrants and other sex offenders available to the public through the Internet."<sup>1</sup> The information enables site visitors to take "appropriate remedial precautions"<sup>2</sup> in protecting themselves and their families, especially children, from repeated acts by offenders.

The Department of the Auditor General's review of the website occurred primarily between August 2009 and January 2010, with updates through mid-June. The State Police responded that it would provide "due consideration" to the recommendations contained in this report.

REPORT CARD FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA MEGAN'S LAW WEBSITE	
Offender Photographs	C-
Information Provided	B
Search Functions	D
Features and Tools	D-
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>	<b>C-</b>
<i>Jack Wagner</i> Pennsylvania Auditor General	

**W**eb site components evaluated; grades. Our continued monitoring of the public website is a service to taxpayers. For this report, we focused on four elements: offender photographs, information provided, search functions, and features/tools. Grading is based on the improvements needed in each area.

**A = Excellent;** needs no improvement.

**B = Good;** needs minimal improvement.

**C = Average;** needs some improvement.

**D = Below average;** needs substantial improvement.

**F = Failing;** needs complete improvement.

Our evaluation included these steps:

- ◆ We reviewed the Megan's Law website from August 2009 through January 2010 (unless otherwise indicated) and analyzed the data and photographs of almost 700 registrants, including sexually violent predators. We checked for consistent information, accurate addresses (such as those of incarcerated offenders), notification of absconders, quality of

## What is Megan's Law and what's required?

**M**egan's Law is named for Megan Kanka, just seven years old when she was brutally raped and murdered in 1994. Her killer was a twice-convicted sex offender who had moved across the street from the Kanka family's home in New Jersey. The family had no knowledge of the past offenses and believes such knowledge could have prevented Megan's death.

Public outcry following the murder led to the adoption of a "Megan's Law" by the federal government, every state, and the District of Columbia within two years. Pennsylvania passed its original version of Megan's Law in 1995.

The Pennsylvania Megan's Law requires the State Police to maintain a public registry of convicted sex offenders. The state's registry included more than 10,000 offenders as of June 16, 2010.

On that same date, 386 of the registered offenders were "sexually violent predators," so deemed by the courts to have a disorder making them likely to engage in predatory sex offenses. Depending on where such predators live and work, either the State Police or local police must also notify the predators' neighbors within 250 feet (or the 25 closest residences and places of employment, whichever is greater).

Sexually violent predators are required to re-register (i.e., verify their addresses) four times a year, while the remaining sex offenders must do so once a year. All registrants are required to report any address change within 48 hours of such change.

**R**esponsibility for registering and the reliability of data depend *as much* on (some would argue they depend *more* on) the convicted offenders than law enforcement agencies. Specifically, registering, re-registering, and providing accurate information are left largely to the sex offenders themselves. It is this self-reported address information—along with other basic identification information from the registry—that the public sees on the Megan's Law website.

photographs, and timeliness of listings.

- ◆ We tested search functions to see if the results included all possible registrants.
- ◆ We reviewed other features and tools on the website, including links to other sites.
- ◆ We reviewed the Pennsylvania Megan's Law and any pending legislation.
- ◆ We reviewed the special performance audit reports released by the Department of the Auditor General in April 2004, January 2005, and May 2006.
- ◆ We reviewed other states' sex offender registry sites and compared their features and tools to those of Pennsylvania's site.
- ◆ We compared the results of our review to an outside evaluation of sites from all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Note: Our 2006 audit cited nationwide report cards issued by Parents for Megan's Law, an advocacy group that gave Pennsylvania an "F" in 2005 and a "D" in 2006. However, the group's review did not focus solely on websites and is therefore not used here.

**Q**uestions, conclusion. We based our overall conclusion on answers to these questions:

- ◆ Does the website include all required information on sex offenders?
- ◆ Is the information useful, accurate, and easily accessible?
- ◆ Does the website offer the best features and tools to help the public?

**Our conclusion is that the Pennsylvania Megan's Law website does not make the grade in providing the public with useful, accurate, and easily accessible information. The website MUST BE IMPROVED.**

## Why should the public look at Megan's Law websites?

Nationwide media reported the March 2010 arrest of a California registered sex offender for the murder and rape of 17-year-old Chelsea King. John Albert Gardner III was also charged with attempting to rape another woman in late 2009 in the same California park where King disappeared.

Another highly publicized case was that of California registered sex offender Phillip Garrido, charged with abducting 11-year-old Jaycee Dugard in 1991, holding her until she was rescued at age 29, and fathering her two children.

Published interviews with neighbors of Garrido revealed they knew he was listed on the state's Megan's Law website. In fact, they considered him suspicious and reported him to law enforcement on several occasions.<sup>3</sup>

Such cases highlight public controversy regarding Megan's Law and its effectiveness. Some say the Megan's Law registry worked well in rescuing Ms. Dugard since Garrido was caught after suspicious police officers realized he was a registered sex offender and investigated further. Others say the system should have worked much faster.

Still others say Megan's Law does nothing to prevent repeat offenses. News reports note that, until Gardner was arrested for the Chelsea King murder, authorities didn't think he posed a heightened threat. "How were we supposed to know [that this] guy is a ticking time bomb?" asked an official in the county where Gardner was registered.<sup>4</sup>

Whether or not *officials* agree on the law's helpfulness, there is no doubt that online registries help the *public* to be mindful of offenders and their potential to re-offend. The executive director of Pennsylvania's Sexual Offenders Assessment Board calls Megan's Law "an extremely effective tool for parents."<sup>5</sup> And Megan Kanka's parents insist they would have distanced their daughter from their neighbor had they known his history.

Closer to home last year, three repeat offenders exemplify the need for public vigilance: one in Lancaster charged with stalking; one in Snyder County charged with molesting four girls, ages 5 to 10, over two years; and one in Delaware County guilty of child pornography who admitted he also spied on two neighborhood girls who were in the nude.



## OFFENDER PHOTOGRAPHS

**Photographs are inconsistent. Some are so inadequate that sex offenders cannot be recognized.**

The Pennsylvania Megan's Law requires that a new photograph be taken of sexually violent predators quarterly during their required verification period, and annually for other sex offenders.<sup>6</sup> The law also requires that the Megan's Law website contain a photograph of each offender and that each photograph "shall be updated not less than annually."<sup>7</sup>

**Inadequate photographs  
diminish usefulness;  
put public safety at risk**

Megan's Law does not specify the number, type, or level of quality of offenders' photographs that must appear on the Megan's Law website. But a law shouldn't be needed to say that photographs must be clear, or that more than one photograph would increase the potential for public recognition.

Each offender's Megan's Law website profile includes only one front-view facial photograph. We reviewed hundreds of photos of Pennsylvania registrants and found photographs that were blurred or grainy, others that were so dark or so light that they obscured features, and others in black and white rather than color.

A few examples of these photographs are shown at right.

With today's technology, all offender photographs should be clear. Anything less is not acceptable.

We also found photographs in which the appearance of offenders was compromised by hats or other accessories, as well as photos in which offenders' eyes were closed.

In addition to *clear* photographs, the public would benefit from seeing *multiple* photographs of each offender, including some taken over time. The website for the registry in Texas, for example, includes current photographs of facial profiles *and* front views, as well as other photos taken (and so labeled) over time.<sup>8</sup>

The Pennsylvania website photographs are further compromised because they do not show the date that photos are taken. Other states, including Texas, provide such dates directly beneath each photograph.

**Previous audits  
questioned whether  
photographs were current**

In our Megan's Law audit report of May 2006, we recommended that photos be clearly dated so the public could judge for itself how much time has passed since photos were taken. Such dating has still not occurred.

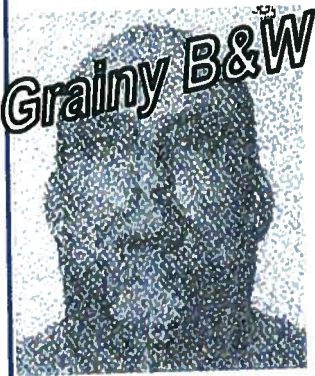
While the public understands that registered sex offenders can change appearances, photographs with dates would help website users determine how likely it is that certain changes have occurred.

For example, the public knows that hair color and styles can be changed almost instantly. However, other changes, such as weight gain or hair loss, could typically happen over time.

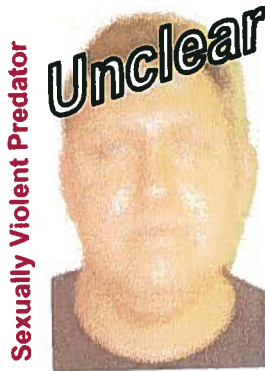
## Poor-quality photos hinder public recognition

Photos below taken from Megan's Law website in October-November 2009.

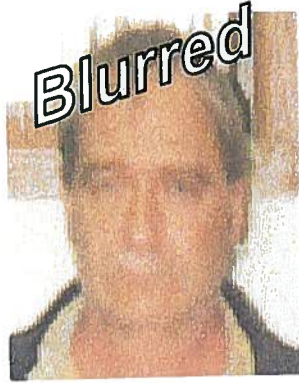
**Poor photos remained for months.** On June 16, 2010, photos 3, 4, 8, and 12 were unchanged; photos 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 were finally replaced; and photos 1 and 11 were removed, but the website does not provide viewers with information showing who is removed or why. These photos are just a sample—auditors continue to find others.



#1 Schuylkill County  
Indecent assault



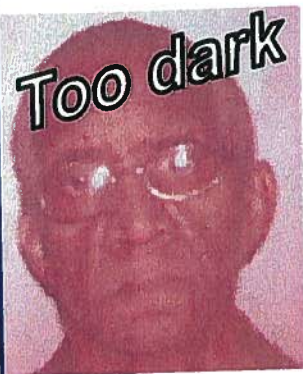
Sexually Violent Predator  
#2. Berks County  
Aggravated indecent assault



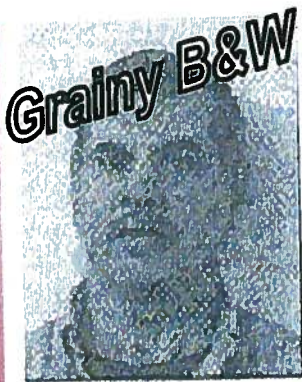
#3 Clearfield County  
Indecent assault



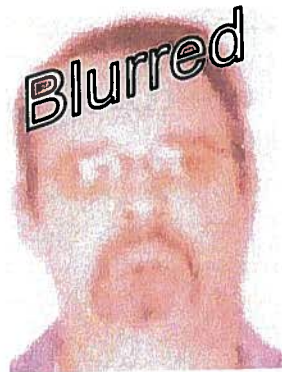
#4 Dauphin County  
Incest



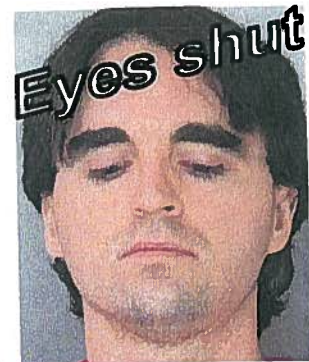
#5 Butler County  
Indecent assault



#6 Butler County  
Aggravated indecent assault



#7 Snyder County  
Involuntary deviate sexual intercourse



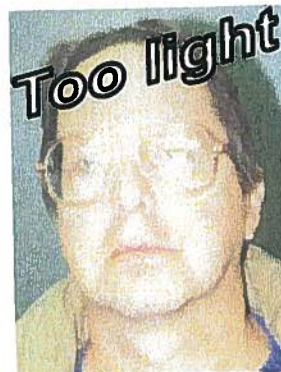
#8 Clearfield County  
Statutory rape



#9 Chester County  
Aggravated indecent assault



#10 Chester County  
Rape



#11 Fayette County  
Sexual abuse of children



#12 Clearfield County  
Indecent assault

Megan's Law requires that a new photograph be taken when offenders show up to register or re-verify their information, and that the photo be updated annually on the Megan's Law website.

Particularly in cases where offenders have common names, site users who recognize an offender's name but not his/her photograph would benefit from seeing dated, multiple photos. Knowing when photos were taken and seeing appearances over time would help viewers to confirm—or rule out—whether a particular offender is the same person whose name they recognize.

The State Police responded to our May 2006 audit report by saying a photograph is taken each time offenders verify or change their data, thereby “evidencing that the photograph was recent and taken in accordance with the law” and that each photograph is the most recent one reported to and on file with the State Police’s Megan’s Law Section.<sup>9</sup>

In 2007, the State Police added a “verification date” to each offender’s profile. But the public has no way of knowing whether that date is when the photograph was actually taken. In fact, we found instances where identical photographs were shown both before and after the new “verification dates.”

Overall, it is nearly impossible for the public to know with certainty if posted photographs of Megan’s Law registrants are current.

### **Recommendations**

***NOTE:** If the State Police or other responsible entity believes that Megan’s Law must be amended to implement any recommendation in this report, then the state should immediately and aggressively seek such legislative changes.*

- 1. The Megan’s Law website should post multiple photographs, including profile views, of each offender.**
- 2. The Megan’s Law website should include clear, color, photographs of all offenders; these photos should not be blurred, grainy, black or white, poorly**

**lighted, or show offenders with eyes closed or with any accessory (e.g., hat) that compromises public recognition.**

- 3. The Megan’s Law website should clearly post the date that each offender’s photograph was taken.**



## **INFORMATION PROVIDED**

**Changes to Megan’s Law resulted in the posting of additional useful information.**

As the result of our May 2006 audit report, Megan’s Law was amended to require the posting of additional useful information about each offender. This change was significant.

Even the group that ranked Pennsylvania’s website 47th nationwide (see page 11) said that Pennsylvania “is ahead of many other states” regarding the information provided.

Improvements began in November 2006 when the General Assembly passed these:

- ♦ Act 143 of 2006 required the inclusion of full residential street addresses for all registered sex offenders on the website, not just sexually violent predators as had been the case beforehand.
- ♦ Act 143 also required the listing of names and locations of educational institutions

where offenders are enrolled.

- ♦ Act 179 of 2006 required the listing of each offender's various physical characteristics, such as gender, race, height, weight, eye and hair color, and any scars, marks, or tattoos.
- ♦ Act 179 also required the listing of license plate numbers and descriptions of vehicles owned by or registered to offenders.
- ♦ For sex offenders convicted after November 30, 2006, Megan's Law was amended by Act 179 to require the disclosure of whether offenders' victims were minors.

#### Other positive changes since our 2006 audit report

In January 2007, the State Police implemented our recommendation to post a total count of registrants and to update the total at least monthly, and actually took our recommendation a step further.

Specifically, now the State Police posts total counts of registrants overall and by county, updating the totals daily.

The State Police initiated other improvements as well. For example, for any county, site visitors can now obtain updated daily counts of sexually violent predators' and sex offenders' residences, employment locations, and school locations.

Also in January 2007, the State Police added a "submit a tip" button on the profile page of each offender, enabling website visitors to submit information that corrects or updates the information posted. These tips can be submitted anonymously.

Prior to developing this special report, and soon after the State Police added its "submit a tip" feature, we tested it and found that our own submitted "tips" resulted in changes

almost immediately. In most cases, we pointed out data entry errors that, although seemingly minor, could significantly alter the results of site searches. On page 9 of this report, we talk more about data entry errors and how they endanger the public.

#### Further improvements needed

Although many of the positive changes resulted from legislation, there are other needed improvements that can be made without changing the law.

**Provide more information on offenses.** In our 2006 audit report, we were critical that the State Police listed only one offense committed per offender, even in cases of multiple offenses covered under Megan's Law. This listing of only one offense continues today.

Megan's Law provides that the website shall contain "a description of the offense or offenses" which triggered Megan's Law registration requirements.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the State Police should be listing *all* sex offenses for which registrants were convicted rather than choosing which offenses the public can view. This information is too important to keep from the public.

**Allow users to identify non-compliant sex offenders easily.** On page 6, we stated that in 2007 the State Police added a "verification date" to each offender's website profile. This date is followed by an explanation that **predators** are compliant if their "verification dates" are within 3 months of the current date, and that **offenders** are compliant if verification is within 12 months of the current date.

The Megan's Law website would be more meaningful if the public didn't have to calculate for itself which offenders have likely absconded (i.e., gone missing) and which ones have not. Indeed, emphasizing this information could help to locate absconders,

some of whom have been missing for years. In addition, potential absconders themselves might be deterred from absconding if they know their status will be clearly posted if they go missing.

***Include explanations for terminology that raises too many questions.*** During our website review, we found terminology on some profiles that can leave the public with too many questions, such as these:

- ♦ What does it mean when an offender's verification date is listed as "none listed in this registry"? Is the offender missing? Did the offender ever register?
- ♦ What does it mean when an offender's street address line shows the word "absconded" but still includes a city, state, and zip code? Is the offender still living in the listed city?

The state of Florida clearly lists each offender's status on the state's sex offender registry site.<sup>11</sup> Examples include "absconded," "incarcerated," "supervised," and "deceased," among others. The site also allows users to click on the status and find out precisely what it means.

Again, the quality of information on Pennsylvania's sex offender site has improved considerably. Only a few more improvements such as those we've discussed would raise the site's grade from a B to an A in this category.

### **Recommendations**

- 4. The Megan's Law website should include a listing of all sex offenses for which each offender was convicted; the State Police should not withhold that information from the public.**
- 5. The Megan's Law website should include a method of emphasizing the verification dates of offenders who are**

**not in compliance with the law.**

- 6. The Megan's Law website should contain clear and consistent terminology and should include definitions where appropriate.**



**The Megan's Law website has inadequate search functions that lead to incomplete searches and compromise public safety.**

Adequate search options are critical to website usefulness. Our 2006 audit report noted that the public could search for registrants only by name, city, county, or zip code. Not available, for example, was the option of searching only for offenders deemed to be sexually violent predators, the most dangerous subset of all registrants.

Soon after our report was released, the State Police added our recommended option of searching only for sexually violent predators.

Additional recommendations we made, however, still remain to be implemented, such as the ability to search for offenders residing within certain specified distances or offenders who are in prison.

Other states have additional search options to increase public usefulness, such as searches by non-compliant offenders and absconders.

**Data entry errors and inconsistencies, including misspellings, are more than cosmetic because they affect search results**

There is one particular deficiency affecting users of Pennsylvania's website that compromises public safety more than any other. Specifically, users of Pennsylvania's site have little margin for misspellings, or variations in spelling, or even for differences in spacing and hyphenations that don't match those entered by the State Police.

In other words, if website users don't enter certain data precisely as the State Police did—even if the State Police entered *wrong* data—search results can be incomplete.

Since 2006, we have periodically sampled website entries for (1) spelling errors and (2) variations in city, municipality, and county names. Over time, we found more than 100 misspellings that State Police officials corrected as we notified them either directly or through their website's "submit a tip" function. In late 2009 when testing another sample, we found 5 misspellings. Just prior to releasing this report in June 2010, we found 24 misspellings in yet another test.

In other routine testing, we found no improvements when we looked for inconsistencies in the way city and municipality names appear in website listings. The seemingly small matter of whether to use a hyphen or space becomes huge because many sex offenders are "lost" from searches if the public does not use hyphens and spaces exactly like the State Police uses them.

**Example:** When we searched "by city" for Megan's Law registrants in **DuBois**, 17 offenders were listed. When we searched using **Du Bois** incorrectly as two words, 6 entirely different names were listed. *See table on next page.*

These same search limitations occur in other

cases with misspellings or with variations in hyphens or spacing. It is critical for the Megan's Law Internet registry to utilize an "extended search function" that recognizes and compensates for common variations in spelling and punctuation.

**Q. Who keeps track of Megan's Law registrants in prison?**

**A. Not clear: The Megan's Law registry conflicts with state and local prison registries**

The Megan's Law website listed prison addresses for about 40 percent of the almost 700 offenders whose profiles we reviewed.<sup>12</sup>

We tested the accuracy of those listings by comparing them with Internet inmate locators maintained by state and county prisons.

It was alarming to find that the Megan's Law registry and the inmate locators had conflicting addresses for 3 predators and 1 offender. But by cross-checking the various sites daily, we found that eventually all sites listed the same addresses for 2 predators and the 1 offender.

The location of the remaining predator was a mystery to us for several months, as recently as March 2010. Our continued checking of the Megan's Law website showed the predator at the Rockview state prison in Centre County, while the Department of Corrections' website (i.e., its inmate locator) did not list this predator at all. We found information elsewhere putting him in the Allegheny County jail, more than 100 miles from Rockview. With the conflicting information, neither we nor the public could tell whether or not this violent predator (whose convictions include rape and child endangerment) was really off the streets.

In April 2010, we finally found matching information on the websites of both the State Police and the Department of Corrections listing this predator at Rockview. But it should not take weeks or months for two state agencies to agree where state prisoners are housed. Families need to have greater levels of comfort.









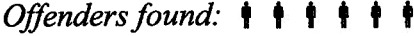

**Recommendations**

- 7. The Megan's Law website should clearly distinguish offenders who have absconded or are otherwise missing/non-compliant.
- 8. The Megan's Law website should allow more types of searches including but not limited to these:
  - ♦ Offenders who reside within user-specified distances
- 9. The Megan's Law website should have an extended search function that recognizes and compensates for variations in spelling and punctuation.
- 10. The State Police should implement routine procedures to identify and correct website data entry errors and inconsistencies.

**Users BEWARE !!**

**Convicted sex offenders can hide behind hyphens and spaces on the Pennsylvania Megan's Law Internet registry**

**In searches by city:**

- ✓ 37 of 67 offenders stayed hidden when we didn't put a hyphen in "Wilkes-Barre."  
Offenders found:   
  
Offenders missed:   

- ✓ 30 of 60 offenders were missed when "McKees" Rocks wasn't typed "Mc Kees" Rocks.  
Offenders found:   
  
Offenders missed:   

- ✓ 17 of 23 offenders were missed when we didn't type "DuBois" as two words.  
Offenders found:   
Offenders missed: 

Most recent search of the above cities was conducted on June 15, 2010; searches in October 2009 and January 2010 returned results that were equally problematic. In addition, we found similar results when searching by other city and town names.



## FEATURES AND TOOLS

### The Megan's Law website lacks enhanced features and tools

The Megan's Law website must provide general information "to inform and educate the public about sex offenders and sexually violent predators" as well as "pertinent and appropriate information concerning crime prevention and personal safety" and links to other related websites.<sup>13</sup>

As of April 2010, the site had links to information such as the state Crimes Code, frequently asked questions, inmate locators, the Klaas Kids Foundation, and the National Sex Offender Registry.

Our review of the sites of other states revealed that Pennsylvania's site lacked important features and tools that are common elsewhere:

**Mapping tool.** Almost two-thirds of the states included mapping tools on their sex offender registry websites. In fact, every one of the 10 top-rated states on TopTenREVIEWS.com had this tool. (See box on this page.)

Mapping tools vary slightly from state to state. In general, by allowing users to enter their addresses or zip codes when making a registry search, the mapping tools result in computer-generated maps showing locations of all sex offenders within specific distances of the designated areas. Users can then

## Pennsylvania's website ranked 47th in nation by technology review group.

As part of our Pennsylvania review, we searched for a national review of sex offender registry websites to help us gauge how Pennsylvania's site fares in comparison with others nationwide.

The most thorough evaluation we found was conducted by [TopTenREVIEWS.com](http://TopTenREVIEWS.com),<sup>14</sup> which issued a 2009 Sex Offender Registry Review of the 50 states and Washington D.C.

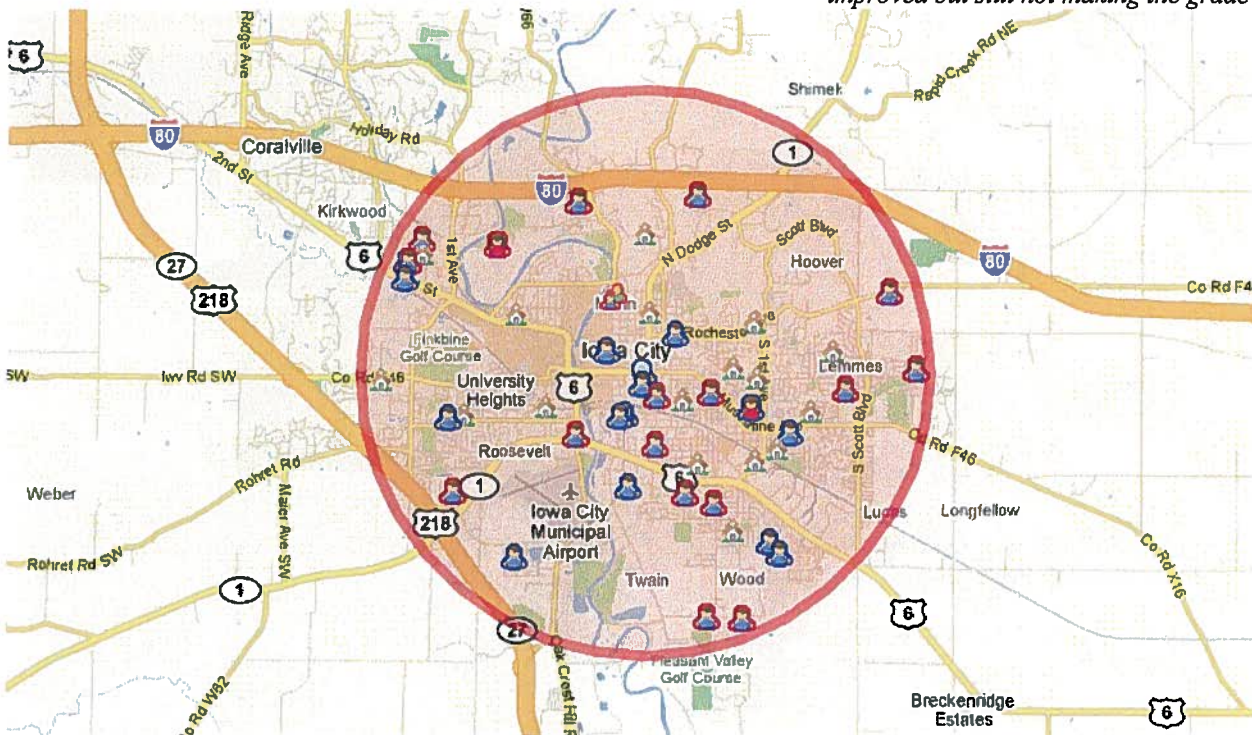
TopTenREVIEWS.com ranked Pennsylvania Megan's Law website near the bottom — 47th of the 51 sites. The top ten states were, in order, Florida, Arizona, Washington, Texas, Indiana, Idaho, Iowa, New York, North Dakota, and Illinois.

The review corroborated many of our own criticisms of the Pennsylvania Megan's Law site. TopTenREVIEWS.com based its rankings on five criteria: information provided, search functions, additional site features, ease of use, and contact information.

Specifically, TopTenREVIEWS.com commented on Pennsylvania's lack of offense details, the lack of an interactive map, and the absence of safety tips written specifically for Pennsylvania residents.

The Pennsylvania Megan's Law website "falls short in adequately addressing the safety concerns of the communities it serves," said the review.

We agree. This statement matches our own conclusion that the Pennsylvania Megan's Law website does not make the grade in serving the public.



The graphic above shows an example of a mapping tool from the Iowa Sex Offender Registry located at [www.iowasexoffender.com](http://www.iowasexoffender.com). The interactive map allows the user to zoom in and out, and color-codes offenders to denote whether they are male or female, as well as whether the offenders' victims were adults or minors. The locations of schools are also denoted on the map.

pinpoint individual offenders and be linked to their profiles for more information.

The state of Iowa offers a mapping tool typical of those we saw from other states. The map above shows the results of our search when we used the mapping tool to identify all offenders within a three-mile radius of Iowa City.

Such tools are valuable resources because they provide the public (and local officials, including law enforcement) with simple, user-friendly ways to see at a glance all registered sex offenders in a certain area, including proximity to schools and parks. As such, we believe that the Pennsylvania Megan's Law site should provide this feature.

**E-mail notification system.** A relatively recent addition to many states' sex offender registry websites is an e-mail notification system. In fact, as of March 2010, almost half

of the states included this option for the public.

E-mail notification systems allow the public to be notified when registered offenders move into a designated area, and also enable citizens to receive alerts when offenders report address changes. These notifications further increase public awareness and vigilance.

On Florida's website, we found an "Offender Alert System" that was launched in 2008. A Florida Department of Law Enforcement official told us the state is "very proud" of this system, which represents a proactive approach to the department's sex offender registry.

"If there is one safety service Florida families should sign up for, this is it,"<sup>15</sup> a department official said in a news release.

**Family safety tips.** We also found that the Pennsylvania site included insufficient public safety information on the website, despite the Megan's Law requirement to provide "pertinent and appropriate information concerning crime prevention and personal safety."<sup>16</sup>

None of the links provided on the Megan's Law website were labeled to indicate that they led to any safety information whatsoever. However, we found a link that led to a website containing a wealth of information on crime prevention and family safety. But how were we to know that this information was available, since the link was labeled "Sexual Offenders Assessment Board"?

By way of contrast, we found that other states (including six of the ten top-ranked states from TopTenREVIEWS.com) provided readily identifiable and accessible links to public safety and family protection information. Florida, for example, offered a link on its home page labeled "Safety Tips," which led to a wide variety of family safety resources. California's website offered a link titled "How to Protect Yourself and Your Family" and provided more than 30 actions to protect families and others from sexual assaults.<sup>17</sup>

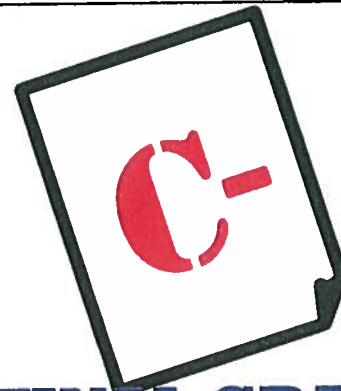
### **Recommendations**

**11. The Megan's Law website should include a sex offender mapping tool to allow the public (and public officials) to see at a glance all offenders in a specified area.**

**12. The Megan's Law website should**

**include an e-mail notification option for the public to receive e-mails when registered offenders move into designated areas.**

**13. The Megan's Law website should offer more information on crime prevention and family safety, and should also provide clearly labeled links to such information.**



## **FINAL GRADE**

**The improved Pennsylvania Megan's Law website still doesn't make the grade.**

Overall, Pennsylvania's citizens are underserved by the Megan's Law website. Even though improved, it does not go beyond the minimum requirements. In fact, in one important matter, it does not even meet the minimum requirement because only one offense is posted for each registrant. To offer families the greatest protection and thereby enhance public safety, Pennsylvania must make significant changes and improvements to its Megan's Law website in all areas: offender photographs, information provided, search functions, and features and tools.

**About our methodology:** This special report is not an audit report. Using the same information available to the general public, we conducted extensive research and used readily accessible information from the Pennsylvania Megan's Law website maintained by the Pennsylvania State Police. We also used information from numerous other sources as noted, including other states. We developed this report as a public service to taxpayers and as a management tool for use by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, including the State Police, to improve the Megan's Law website. We may also use this report as a planning tool for future special performance audits.

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## NOTES

- 1 42 Pa.C.S. Section 9798.1(a).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Debra J. Saunders, "The trouble with ankle bracelets," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 1, 2009, at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/08/31/ED8T19GCP1.DTL>. Access verified March 1, 2010.
- 4 Sara Burge, *The Press-Enterprise*, Riverside, California, "Experts say the public has 'unrealistic' expectations about preventing sex crimes," [http://www.pe.com/localnews/stories/PE\\_News\\_Local\\_W\\_offender08.4169fea.html#end](http://www.pe.com/localnews/stories/PE_News_Local_W_offender08.4169fea.html#end).
- 5 Holly Herman, "New sexual predator law to mandate closer supervision of offenders in Berks, across U.S.," *Reading Eagle*, originally published November 22, 2009. Access verified March 1, 2010, at <http://readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=170017>.
- 6 42 Pa.C.S. Section 9796(a) and (b).
- 7 42 Pa.C.S. Section 9798.1(c)(1)(vi).
- 8 Access to the State of Texas Sex Offender Registry website was verified March 1, 2010, at [https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/DPS\\_WEB/SorNew/index.aspx](https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/DPS_WEB/SorNew/index.aspx).
- 9 April 12, 2006, response by the Pennsylvania State Police to the Department of the Auditor General's audit of the administration of Megan's Law (third report), released in May 2006.
- 10 42 Pa.C.S. Section 9798.1(c)(1)(xii).
- 11 Access to the Florida Sexual Offenders and Predators website verified March 1, 2010, at <http://offender.fdle.state.fl.us/offender/homepage.do>.
- 12 Although Pennsylvania's sex offenders are not required to register until they are released from custody, many registrants on the Megan's Law website list prison addresses. These registrants may be in prison because of subsequent convictions.
- 13 42 Pa.C.S. Section 9798.1(b)(5).
- 14 Pennsylvania ranked 47th both in 2009 and 2010. According to its website, "TopTenREVIEWS is a technology review site covering software, Web services, consumer electronics and entertainment, offering millions of reviews in more than 350 categories. Founded in 2003, TopTenREVIEWS.com provides consumers with side-by-side product and pricing comparisons to help them research, shop and purchase technology and entertainment products and services." As recently as March 1, 2010, we verified access to the website at <http://www.toptenreviews.com/>.
- 15 Florida Department of Law Enforcement, June 24, 2009, press release, "One Millionth Sex Offender E-mail Alert Notification Sent Out." Access verified March 1, 2010, at [http://www.vineco.com/sitedocs/PR-SOS\\_062409.pdf](http://www.vineco.com/sitedocs/PR-SOS_062409.pdf).
- 16 42 Pa.C.S. Section 9798.1(b)(5).
- 17 "How to Protect Yourself and Your Family," Office of the Attorney General, State of California. Access to website verified March 1, 2010, at <http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov/protect.aspx>.

Questions about this report? Contact the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 318 Finance Building, Harrisburg, Pa., 17120, 717-787-1381. Or visit online at [www.auditorgen.state.pa.us](http://www.auditorgen.state.pa.us).