



## **Women's Center Update: A critical look at Proposition 83**

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With November elections close at hand, people want to know whether Prop 83, better known as Jessica's Law, is the best course of action to keep our children safe from registered sex offenders. Prop 83 would enforce stricter laws to protect the community's children, but unfortunately, there are flaws in this plan that may cause unforeseen problems.

Proposition 83 proposes increased regulations on convicted sex offenders including amendments to this law that may initially sound appealing, such as GPS tracking devices, tougher restrictions on where a sex offender can live, and tougher mandatory minimum sentences.

If Proposition 83 passes, convicted sex offenders released on parole will be required to wear a GPS ankle bracelet for life. Tracking a child molester's every move may sound appealing, but technology is not perfect. A GPS tracking device will only let law enforcement know where offenders are located while doing nothing to report the actions of the offender. The GPS device will not deliver an electric shock or send a message to law enforcement every time an adult touches a child. There are many issues concerning the technology involved. For example, the GPS tracking device will occasionally lose its signal, similar to a cell phone. Every time the GPS loses its signal and disappears from the radar, law enforcement must decide whether to send an officer to respond.

Sending an officer out to check on every sex offender each time the GPS loses a signal could cost the state billions of dollars and makes sure fewer officers are available to respond to other safety needs in the community.

Additionally, it will be the sex offender's responsibility to charge his or her ankle bracelet, just as you would charge a cell phone. If the battery dies the signal disappears, law enforcement must, once again, decide whether to send an officer to respond. Although GPS tracking devices are a great idea on paper, technology is not ready for this kind of commitment and law enforcement agencies are designed to respond to actual safety emergencies, not to monitor the location (and not the actions) of convicted sex offenders.

Jessica's Law would prohibit convicted sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet of a school, park or any other sites that local government deem appropriate. This sounds like a wonderful safety precaution, but this proposal automatically places children in rural areas at greater risk of abuse. If Prop. 83 passes, convicted sex offenders will be unable to live anywhere within the city limits of San Francisco or Los Angeles. While this may make children living in these cities safer, it forces offenders to move to rural areas with far fewer resources to address child sexual abuse, such as South Lake Tahoe. This puts all children living in non-urban settings at greater risk of being sexually abused. In addition, this restriction on where sex offenders may live totally ignores the fact that the vast majority of sexual abuse of children is committed by someone the child knows and trusts, and the abuse often takes place in the child's home, not at school, in parks, or in other public places.

Jessica's Law creates tougher, life-long regulations for all sex offenders, regardless of their offenses. This means that a 19-year-old convicted of statutorily raping his 17-year-old girlfriend will be required to wear a GPS tracking device for life, just the same as a 50-year-old sexual predator convicted of molesting a child. Therefore, someone convicted of statutory rape will never be able to visit a park, or even pick up his own children at school in the future.

Due to these concerns and many others, even those who dedicate their lives to protect children from abuse do not feel confident enough in Jessica's Law to support Prop 83. The California State Coalition Against Sexual Assault strongly opposes Proposition 83. To read more about the California State Coalition's opposition visit [www.calcasapublicpolicy.org](http://www.calcasapublicpolicy.org).

South Lake Tahoe Women's Center is dedicated to improving the lives of families and children in our community. For the past 20 years, South Lake Tahoe Women's Center has provided Child Abuse Prevention education in local schools, including all three elementary schools, STMS, STHS, Montessori and St. Theresa. The elementary school-age children are taught to say no to strangers and that their bodies belong to them. They also learn ways to avoid potentially dangerous situations and what to do if someone were to hurt them or touch them in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. If you have any questions about the program or would like to view the materials presented, please call the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center at (530) 544-2118 or stop by our office at 2941 Lake Tahoe Blvd., across from South Tahoe Middle School. The Women's Center business office was financed through a low-cost loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.

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