

Spatial Implications of Municipal Sex Offender
Residency Restrictions in Bay County, Florida, 2005-2007

Abstract

Crimes against children are very disturbing and none perhaps more atrocious than child molestation. In the hopes of lowering the rate of recurrent offenses, society has turned to legislative solutions including residency restrictions for convicted sex offenders and predators. In 2006, six local municipalities in Bay County, FL, passed housing restrictions for sexual offenders and predators that extended the existing State of Florida 1000 foot residency buffer zones. These municipal buffers prohibit sex offenders from living within 2500 feet of schools, day care centers, parks, playgrounds, school bus stops, and places where children congregate.

Analysis from this study is designed to compare the spatial effects of sex offender residency in Bay County, FL from 2005-2007. Specifically the study asks, *Has sex offender residency geographic distribution changed in Bay County, FL since the enactment of municipal sex offender residency restrictions?* It was concluded that sex offender residency distribution has changed and that residency restrictions have contributed to these changes.

The mean center of the sex offender population shifted in a northerly direction away from municipalities with residency restrictions. Although marginally, the sex

offender population became less clustered. Overall, residency buffers blocked only 7.08% of the total area within the county; however, percentages within individual cities were very high. Cities with restrictions saw a reduction in the number offenders, and cities and areas without restrictions saw an increase in the number of offenders. The numbers of offenders excluded from the study due to absconding or transience was very low. Numbers of offenders incarcerated increased in 2006, then saw a decline in 2007. The rate of offenders leaving the state declined after enactment of the ordinances. The percentage of legally allowed residentially zoned area for sex offenders to establish residency was 64%.