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FRANKLIN CITIZENS SPEAK OUT NOW IT'S TIME FOR ACTION

A legislative column by state Senator Mary Lazich (R-New Berlin)

The grassroots group *Citizens for a Safe Franklin* is to be congratulated for performing an outstanding community service. Confronted with the horrible prospect of having numerous sexually violent persons dumped in their neighborhoods, Franklin residents stood tall. With resounding opposition, they told the special committee attempting to find a home for predators to look somewhere else.

What is really commendable is that Franklin citizens went beyond simply objecting. They went a significant step further by turning their outcries into an act of public service. This conscientious group developed a list of recommendations to deal with the predator problem. Their proposals are fair, reasonable, and constructive, and I am very pleased to introduce them as bills in the state legislature. Recommendations made by *Citizens for a Safe Franklin* are being drafted as bills for consideration in the upcoming fall legislative session. They include the following:

- 1) A repeal of the state statute calling for the state to spend over \$1.2 million to find transitional housing in densely populated Milwaukee County for sexually violent predators.
- 2) Amending Wisconsin Statute Chapter 980, in part, to require that a sexually violent predator approved for release must be returned to the city, town or village in which he/she lived at the time of his/her arrest, or, in the alternative, to a county or another state that has agreed to accept sexually violent predators. The court could not consider a location that is within 3,000 feet of a school, playground, daycare, children's shelter, school bus stop, or place children congregate. Wisconsin would, as 30 other states have done, implement a state-wide Global Positioning System to monitor the real-time whereabouts of sexually violent predators.
- 3) Enhancing Wisconsin's Sex Offender Registry to include more information about offenders, including a note in red identifying offenders classified as sexually violent persons, a clear, large photograph of the offender along with a physical description, the offender's name, address, city, zip code and compliance status, the nature of the offender's crime, all information about hearings



involving a petition to release a sexually violent predator from civil commitment, the name of the judge who authorizes a predator's release, and all conditions of an offender's or predator's release.

The bills will make the necessary changes to keep neighborhoods safe from sexually violent persons. However, the job of concerned citizens is not over. *Citizens for a Safe Franklin* will be needed at public hearings to carry that same strong message to Madison. Citizens will be needed at legislative hearings at the state capitol. In addition, citizens should contact elected state officials to urge support for this much-needed legislation.

The time for citizen action is more important now than ever. Facing tremendous opposition, the special siting committee decided not to recommend a site in Franklin to house sexually violent persons, or any other location in Milwaukee County. However, the chairman of the committee, Stan Stojkovic is urging the state to seek a court order forcing Milwaukee County to build a facility for predators.

Chairman Stojkovic's directive is of great concern. After his committee issued a final report without recommending a single site in the entire state to house predators, Chairman Stojkovic seemed to lash out at the people who stood up for their neighborhoods. He said his committee "often times faced ignorant or indifferent politicians at every turn" in the process. He referred to "a contentious and unreasonable body that chose to malign the committee and its efforts," and also stated political leaders chose to "discourage public debate surrounding the importance of the issues."

This is insulting to all the people who fully understood and grasped the issue at hand and participated in the democratic process. Chairman Stokjovic's slap in the face to these citizens and their elected representatives as well as his directive to bypass the will of the people and use the courts to locate a facility where it is not wanted should serve as ample incentive for everyone to remain concerned and stay active.

This fight is not over. It can be won, but only if every concerned citizen works harder than ever before. The safety of our neighborhoods and our most prized commodity, our children, is at stake.