



Federal law toughens sex offender registration

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2007-04-29 21:57:25

Federal authorities have charged a Clinton County man under a new federal child sex offender law that Madison County authorities say could be put to use in some local cases.

Richie Cole, 39, was indicted recently in U.S. District Court in East St. Louis on a charge of failure to register as a sex offender.

He could get up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 and a term of supervised release between five years and life — far more than he would have gotten if charged under the state's law.

He was charged under the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, which went into effect July 27.

"Anything that gets perverts off the streets and gives them more jail time, I'm all for it," Madison County Sheriff Robert Hertz said.

State's Attorney William Mudge said his office would likely cooperate with federal authorities in deciding on which level to charge certain sex crimes, much as they now do with drug cases.

"It's not uncommon for us to confer with one another on whether to charge under state or federal statutes," Mudge said. Some of the biggest drug cases, for example, go to federal court where sentences are stiffer.

Under state law, failure to register as a sex offender the first time is a Class 3 felony, punishable by from two to five years in prison. A second offense is a Class 2 felony, punishable by between three and seven years in prison.

Illinois law requires sex offenders to remain registered for 10 years. The new federal law requires registration for a minimum of 15 years, or more, depending on the crime.

The federal law expands The National Sex Offender Registry. It will integrate the information in state sex offender registry systems and ensure that law enforcement has access to the same information across the United States, helping prevent sex offenders from evading detection by moving from state to state.

Mudge said the law would be especially effective in tracking transient sex offenders.

The new law also imposes tough mandatory minimum penalties for the most serious crimes against children and increases penalties for crimes such as sex trafficking of children and child prostitution.

It also provides grants to states to help them institutionalize sex offenders who have shown they cannot change their behavior and are about to be released from prison.

The Walsh act authorizes new regional Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces that will provide funding and training to help state and local law enforcement combat crimes involving the sexual exploitation of minors on the Internet.

The act is named after Adam Walsh, who was abducted from a Florida shopping mall and later murdered. His father, John Walsh, is host of TV's "America's Most Wanted" and a constant crusader for law enforcement.

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