

# Judiciary Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1500

AN ACT CONCERNING VERIFICATION OF SEXUAL OFFENDER

**Title:** REGISTRANTS' ADDRESSES.

**Vote Date:** 4/10/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/17/2025

**File No.:**

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## REASONS FOR BILL:

Currently, individuals on Connecticut's sex offense registry are required by state law to confirm their address by returning a letter mailed by the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) every three months. The signed letter must be received by DESPP within 10 days. If the address verification letter is not received within 10 days, the individual is determined to be "non-compliant," and notice is provided to the local police. In Connecticut, "failure to verify" is a strict liability Class D felony, punishable by up to 5 years in prison and/or the extension of the term of probation. This results in convictions of individuals who are living in a registered address but whose paperwork is simply lost or late. Enforcement is inconsistent, solely determined by the local police department. Some who are non-compliant are never arrested, others are arrested years after they became non-compliant. Therefore, this bill makes verification of addresses by registrants possible by telephone, extend the period for which a person must return an address verification form, and decriminalize such failure if not intentional.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel, Director, Division of Public Defender Services, State of Connecticut:** We support allowing more time for persons to comply with the sex offender registry address verification. There are times when released persons are homeless and there are obstacles in obtaining housing, so they do not receive the mailings and information to comply with the law. Those that are unemployed and lack the finances to update in person need a process perhaps over the telephone to comply with the law. This will reduce the penalty for unintentional violations.

**DeVaughn Ward, Esq, Office of the Correction Ombudsman:** This bill will potentially impact individuals experiencing homelessness by giving the opportunity to verify their addresses over the telephone. Extending the deadline for returning verification forms and distinguishing between intentional and unintentional failures modernizes the process while maintaining oversight. This improves compliance, reduces administrative burden, and ensures enforcement is directed to those who pose an actual risk. Law enforcement and oversight agencies now can focus their resources on individuals who deliberately evade registration and ensures mechanisms are fair, effective and proportionate - a great balance between forward to refining Connecticut's approach to offender registrations.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut:** We believe all people should have equal opportunity to contribute to society and build fulfilling lives. A criminal record is one of the biggest injustices people face and the consequences from the criminal record can persist for years and even lifetimes. Connecticut residents with criminal records have over 550 legal barriers preventing them from obtaining employment, housing, education, and long-term care. Connecticut needs to eliminate collateral consequences of criminal records by changing the way people are required to verify their addresses every three months and having the ability to make a telephone call to confirm their address especially when homeless. Reducing the penalty for a late letter to an infraction is the most crucial part of the bill.

**David Wasch, Legislative Coordinator, One Standard of Justice:**

One Standard of Justice appreciates accuracy in the public registry, but the liability standard must change. More than 200 people are convicted of a class D felony for something out of their control. The law is unjust and reduces public safety by destroying employment and housing gains. The bill language makes great improvements, but may we suggest the following amendments: expand the requirement of intent to cover initial registration, photo updates, and address and email updates; and narrow the circumstances under which a phone-in option is available. The bill provides an opportunity to meet the obligations of the registry while saving the state resources that are mis-spent on the arrest, trial and punishment of law-abiding people.

**Melinda Bronson, Education Team Chair, Restorative Action Alliance (RAA):**

We seek to end cycles of sexual violence and support policies that invest our resources into practices that will produce public safety as opposed to a false sense of security and perpetuating the cycle of harm. The collateral consequences due to late mail or illness can cause harm to the registrar and family. Our state resources should go towards measures that promote healing, restore well-being, and treat individuals with dignity.

**William Hobson, M.S., LPC Valley Counseling Associates:**

As a therapist who has worked with sexual offenders for over 50 years, I know the stress and anxiety of my clients due to the Sex Offender Registry. Those are trying to comply with the registry but due to problems with mail delivery, sabotage by hostile neighbors, honest errors on their part or some other factor, they face sanctions for failing to return the letters on time. This disrupts their lives and in some instances their employment, housing and other needs.

**Danielle Cooper, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, University of New Haven:**

Removing the Class D felony for address verification will help alleviate the over 200 additional people's system involvement. The reforms do not do enough. I suggest the following: broaden the reduction to infraction to include all "failure to verify offenses including initial registration, headshot photo renewal and notification of address change and reserve the phone-in option for when the USPS is not accessible such as someone who is homeless, lives in a housing shelter, half-way houses or medical institutions. These reforms are one part of the system transformations needed for more equity for all.

**Jennifer Jasenski, Board of Directors, One Standard of Justice:**

As a retired teacher, survivor of date rape, and partner of a disabled man who is on the Registry, I support the bill. People who are homeless, live in group and halfway houses and long-term care facilities where their mail is controlled by others are all in danger of a class D felony for address verification. Over 1000 individuals on the Registry are over 62 and living in nursing facilities. The bill still holds them accountable to verify their address, it just changes the late infraction, increases the days to 20, and allows phone verification.

**Taina Manick, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Katal Center:**

The current verification system imposes unintended consequences, and this bill provides a more realistic equitable system. The bill addresses unnecessary penalties, logistical barriers, compliance and a realistic timeframe for address verification. Phone verification is crucial for those without stable housing and ensures they are not further penalized due to their housing

status. The bill creates a more equitable system and addresses the unintended consequences that affect vulnerable individuals.

**Marisol Garcia, Executive Director of Prison2Public Policy:**

The bill takes critical steps to mitigate these harms by: extending the verification deadline from 10 days to 20 days from the postmark, reducing the risk of criminalizing delays caused by factors like mail disruptions or personal emergencies; introducing a phone-in option for individuals who are homeless, live in institutions, or otherwise lack access to reliable mail services; reducing the penalty to an infraction in most cases, ensuring that enforcement is fair and proportional to the nature of the offense; and requiring proof of criminal intent for felony charges, eliminating the unjust application of strict liability and preventing unnecessary criminalization. These provisions are long overdue. This reform benefits the whole community.

**Paul Atkin, Norwalk,**

I am on the registry because of an out of state conviction and as a business owner, homeowner, and property taxpayer, I have been registered with CSP for over 17 years. Every three months I wait terrified for my quarterly mail from DPS. I use the USPS delivery app and go to my mailbox as soon as the delivery which allows me to return the letter quickly to verify my longstanding address. If the letter does not arrive because of unforeseen problems, I will be charged with a felony and potentially imprisoned for lack of response. One letter took 16 days to go from Norwalk to Middletown and I was marked non-compliant and called almost daily to check on my status. DP's had me wait for my second violation letter to arrive when that finally arrived, they marked me compliant because the post mark was within the 19-day requirement. The changes in this bill will increase the deadline and reduce the penalty of a conviction.

**Caroline Dahm:**

My uncle has returned his letters for 16 years but there were a couple of situations where the mail was lost, and these though resolved put a strain on him and our family. This does not make sense. He is not in control of something that could jeopardize his freedom. If convicted of a class D felony, it is harder for people to restart their life. Late paperwork does not justify a Class D felony.

**Prince Davis, West Haven:**

On the Morning of March 27, 2014, I was awakened by loud knocks on my front door that was kicked in by four US Marshals due to an arrest warrant for failure to return an address verification letter. I was taken to the West Haven Police department and then to Milford Superior court before a judge. After a long, stressful, and expensive legal process, the conviction was wiped from my record after one year because of this technical issue. I now return my verification letters via return receipt to ensure I have a tracking number to cover myself. Mistakes still can happen and in 2022 I received a Notice of Violation for a letter I had confirmed delivered. The letter was found but I came close to another conviction. The law needs to be changed.

**Jack, Shelton, Connecticut:**

In 2023 I was put on the registry for 10 years which, at 77 and with no prior arrests or accusations, is a life sentence for me. I did not commit this crime as explained in my

testimony but adding address verification to me is a form of harassment by the courts. I believe there must be a review of all the laws governing the registry which only hurts people.

**Susan Glass, Middletown:**

As a resident of Connecticut and a friend of someone who is on the registry and in the agency that supports the SO registry, I know how the management of deadlines, paperwork, and receipts can be difficult to maintain. Many of our community supervised neighbors do not have access to computers, emails or even stable residences. I have access to these tools but still can incur late charges due to delays in the USPS. My penalty is a fee, not an arrest or additional criminal charges. The sex offender file is something we live with for the perceived safety of others, but I question the efficacy and it should not drag our neighbors further into the judicial process due to hurdles other need not bear.

**Russell Haigh, Waterford:**

As a registered sex offender in 2018, I was notified in 2021 that an address verification letter had not arrived. I called the Registry to get clarification and during that conversation the officer verbally verified my address and instructed me to return the letter. I received a third letter approximately two weeks later. I again called the Registry, and they told me the mail probably overlapped and if I returned the letter, I was fine. I was not allowed to leave the state until my case was resolved. My lawyer obtained the phone records and proved my intent to comply. The quickest way to resolve this was to accept a plea agreement of guilty with no consequences. I had to accept a felony charge for a crime I had no control over so that I could see my family.

**Bryan Kearney, East Haven:**

When I served in law enforcement, I believe that we were designed to solve problems and not exacerbate them. Affirmative defenses do and should exist because one size does not fit all. Might I suggest the following: Provide a backup contact (when someone cannot be reached) to help them avoid a non-compliance warrant; eliminate warrant approvals when subsequent compliances have been completed; reduce penalty to an infraction, with progressive penalties for continued noncompliance after a possible hearing; phone option with personal PIN; and an online option to register.

**Anthony Luther, Shelton:**

Having worked with families that have members on the Registry, I am familiar with the other side of the consequences of the law and the collateral damage it does to family members. I know of no one who has deliberately failed to file quarterly but have spoken to many that were late due to the reliability of the mail or registry complications. Please examine the financial cost versus the true but not perceived safety.

**Salvatore Mauro, West Haven:**

As someone who is on the Registry, I am very diligent in making sure my form is submitted as soon as received. I send it priority with a signature and keep copies of all receipts and documents. I did have a situation during Covid and contacted the SOR to explain the situation. They instructed me to wait for the second letter and then send it in. SRO told me everything was received and verified. In 2022, I had the state police come to my door with a warrant for the late form in 2019. I spent five hours in jail until I was bailed out and had to go to four court appearances to have these issues removed. I had a similar situation in 2025 but contacted the PO and explained and submitted receipts. I am now paranoid that every time I

submit the letter it is going to be another warrant for my arrest. The SOR address verification process needs to be revised. I have included in my testimony the receipts I receive when mailing my address verification forms.

**Joseph Morneault, Old Saybrook:**

For almost 20 years now I have been compliant on the S.O. Registry but have found my integration into society has been overshadowed by the irrational application of the 90-day verification letter. This bill will correct the following: letters lost, delayed, or sent out of time, resulting in unfair arrest; being convicted of a class D felony, derailing progress made in building a better life; and homeless people and those trying to find a new home should not fear arrest simply because of the difficulties from the current practice of the "verification letter".

**Adam Nielsen, Preston:** As a registered sex offender for more than 5 years, I feel anxiety and stress when the verification letter arrives. This letter is shared by my loved ones. In 2024 while working for a wonderful company, I was pulled over on a felony warrant for an offense committed in 2023. I was not aware of the offense and the company terminated me the following day. I submitted 20 address verification forms but the post mark on this one form was 1-day late which triggered a felony arrest. I struggle to find new employment and have implemented steps to protect myself against the extremely invasive address verification form process. This is not a public safety but a blatant form of on-going punishment for a crime I was already punished for. I committed a non-violent crime more than a decade ago and this is the only way I am seen.

**Jocelyn Scallion, MSW Student:** The bill makes four important improvements: it extends the deadline from 10 to 20 days from postmark; adds a phone-in option to verify address; reduces the penalty to an infraction in most cases; and requires proof of criminal intent for felony charges. The proposed changes in SB1500 will prevent unnecessary arrests and convictions, reduce court caseloads and costs to the state, allow more flexibility for extenuating circumstances, and maintain address verification while improving fairness.

**Jesse Osmun, New Haven:** While the bill does not eliminate the CT Registry, it has a commonsense approach like phone verification, extended time to report and eliminating late reporting as a serious criminal offense. Unhoused individuals who register struggle with the verification process and need smart justice reform and fairness.

**Olivia Rinkes:** The bill provides a good step in reducing additional charges accumulation through non-intentional failures to update addresses. Making this a misdemeanor is a good step and making the system accessible by phone is helpful to those that do not have a physical address.

**Todd St. Germain, Norwich:** I have been convicted for a letter being one date late. I did receive violation notification and remember the fear it created. I was told the letter was received and no problem but 4 years later was arrested and convicted. I now have a class D felony on my record and have lost two jobs and are unable to find someone who will employ a person with a sex offence conviction. This bill will help so many people.

**Carrie W., New Canaan:** The current law does more harm than good. I recently moved with my partner who is on the registry, and he changed his address at both the post office and

registry. Because of a mistake at the US Postal Service, our address change was not processed, and we lost weeks of mail. Imagine if that had happened to the registry letter. He could have been convicted of a felony through no fault of his own. There are many reasons the verification letter could be late and blanketing all as a class D felony is unfair and incredibly disruptive to people who are truly remaining compliant and restart their life.

**Casey Russo:** I support the bill and the modification to the law to make it more flexible and compassionate.

**Gus Marks-Hamilton, Campaign Manager, ACLU of Connecticut's Smart Justice:** We support the bill.

**Brittany Hayward, Director, Communications and Outreach, Connecticut Second Look Sentencing Project:** We support the bill.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by:** Pamela Bianca

**Date:** April 23, 2025