

# Task force urges stricter penalties for sex crimes

## State panel calls for life sentences

Associated Press

OWENSBORO, Ky. — Sex offenders would face harsher sentences, including life in prison without parole for repeat offenders, under recommendations made by a state task force.

The task force also called for all felony sex crimes to be considered violent offenses and juvenile sex offenders to be treated as adults.

The recommendations by Lt. Gov. Steve Pence's panel are receiving mixed reviews from the legal community.

"Everyone really devoted a lot of time to looking at the recommendations from the public, especially from the public forums," said Bridget Skaggs Brown, commissioner of the state Department of Juvenile Justice, who led the group.

Daviess Commonwealth's Attorney Jay Wethington said he was pleased with the recommendations.

Wethington said the panel's emphasis is on stronger sentences instead of more treatment for sexual offenders.

The prosecutor said increased notification for the public also is important, but he worries about increasing the workload for law-enforcement agencies without sufficient funding.

"I believe the spotlight on the sexual predator is more beneficial to the public and to future potential victims," Wethington said.

Ernie Lewis, head of the state Department of Public Advocacy, said he is forming a group to examine the recommendations.

But several are already cause for concern, he said.

Lewis is concerned about recommendations that seem to cut back protection of juvenile defendants.

Particularly problematic is the idea of lifetime penalties for sex offenders, either as registrants or as prisoners, Lewis said.

"I'm not sure our views were reflected in several areas," he said.

Pence plans to work with lawmakers to draft legislation.

His spokeswoman, Jeanne Lausche, said she hopes the bills will be filed before the end of the year.

Six bills relating to sex offenses and sex offenders have been filed for the General Assembly session that begins in January.

The proposals cover increased notification for the public about where sex offenders are living; tighter controls over where sex offenders go, including monitoring through global positioning systems; stiffer sentences for many sexual offenses; and increased registration requirements.