

# Sunday Star-Ledger

May 29, 1966

## The SEX OFFENDER

*Sixteen years after  
a 'model' sex offender  
law was enacted, Jersey is  
implementing its therapeutic  
recommendations*

*W - Sex Crimes*

By BRUCE BAILEY

Sixteen years after a "model" sex offender law was enacted, New Jersey is taking positive steps to implement the therapeutic recommendations upon which the statute was drafted.

The Assembly last week ordered a full review of the state's laws on sex offenders and will put a six-member legislative commission to work on the probe.

Assemblyman Vito Albanese (D-Bergen), one of the chief proponents of the study, pointed out sex offenders are still a major problem in New Jersey.

Gov. Richard J. Hughes has allocated \$12 million to the State Department of Institutions and Agencies in his 1966 fiscal budget and \$800,000 will be used to establish a one-purpose diagnostic center to care for sex offenders.

Through the years, the establishment of such a center — as recommended by the committee of the Legislature which designed the much-lauded sex offender statute — was allowed to be all but forgotten.

Late in 1964, Hughes expressed misgivings about the sex offender law and in accord with Lloyd W. McCorkle, commissioner of institutions and agencies, declared all persons charged with sex offenses would be cared for in one hospital.

Grand jury criticism, particularly in Morris County, of lax supervision of sex offenders confined to various state hospitals has spurred members of the Legislature and private citizen committees to support the governor's stand.

Menlo Park Diagnostic Center will receive the \$800,000 for conversion into a one-purpose hospital to test and treat sex offenders.

Dr. Ralph Brancale, director of the center, said the money would be used to add hospital facilities and tighten security precautions.

McCorkle, former warden of Trenton State Prison, said work on the conversion will begin as soon as children at the center are phased out to another institution.

Just what is the sex offender law which received widespread publicity upon its enactment?

Actually, the law provides that male sex

offenders be sent to a diagnostic center for testing. If they are found to be suffering from compulsive mental disorders which can be treated, they are hospitalized.

Otherwise, they are returned to the courts for sentencing to prison.

The law is sound, but the lack of a central hospital for the sex offenders means that those tested at Menlo Park and deemed in need of hospitalization are shunted off to state mental hospitals such as Greystone and Marlboro.

Once hospitalized, the offenders are practically allowed to fend for themselves, establish their own "open door" policies and in general become a thorn in the side of hospital administrators, according to grand jury presentments in the last five years.

This defeated the therapeutic reasoning behind the sex offender law, but the governor feels that will be rectified now that all persons charged with sex crimes will be screened under one roof and kept there for treatment if needed.

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Are sex offenders suffering from an illness?

According to Dr. Brancale and his associates, including psychiatric consultants to the Department of Institutions and Agencies, that is a difficult question to answer.

"Sex offenders are not suffering from what the lay person might call an illness," Dr. Brancale said. "Rather, they suffer from a breakdown in the accepted behavior pattern.

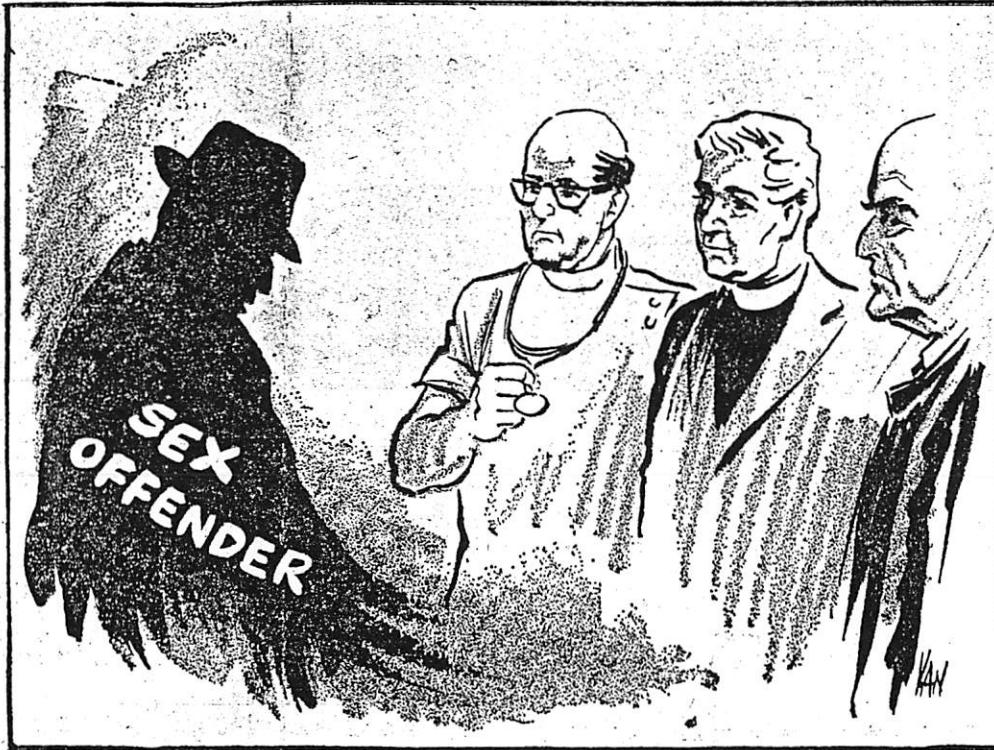
"This breakdown," he declared, "may be caused by many reasons including environment and psychological disturbances."

At Menlo Park, staff personnel are able to weed out those who will benefit from hospitalization and be restored to a sound mind from the recalcitrant offender — the one who proves resistant to handling or treatment.

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The recalcitrant offender, who usually finds his way to segregated cellblock areas in Trenton State Prison or Rahway Prison Farm, is determined by the repetitive compulsion of his acts and whether children are the target for his offenses.

"These are definite signs of abnormality," Dr. Brancale suggested, "and give grounds for determining whether the offender should be



put away from society."

Of those hospitalized, what are the potential dangers to society once they are released?

Dr. Brancale said less than 10 per cent ever repeat the sex offense for which they were committed — "at least during the period of supervised parole."

As for the "dangerous" sex offender, Dr. Brancale asserted only "a very small percentage actually would attempt to harm a person physically."

"The danger of their corrupting children," he said, "runs about 30 per cent."

Once a rapport is established between the staff at Menlo Park and the offender, therapeutic treatment can begin and the patient

can eventually be restored to a useful life, Dr. Brancale concluded.

Prosecutor Frank C. Scerbo of Morris County, who conducted a grand jury investigation into conditions at Greystone Park in Morristown, hailed the proposed one-purpose hospital.

Scerbo's investigation was touched off when a young Wharton college coed was discovered dead in her wrecked automobile shortly after having a clandestine tryst with a sex offender confined to Greystone.

Discussing the removal of sex offenders from mental institutions such as Greystone to the proposed unit at Menlo Park, Scerbo said:

"If the 1949 recommendations for such a

center are realized, the law would then be the closest—and best—answer to the sex offender problem.

"The law, as originally intended, has never been fully implemented and it is difficult to understand why so many years passed before positive action was taken."

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The sex offender law, though, could be further strengthened, according to the head of New Jersey's largest police department.

Newark Police Director Dominick A. Spina recommends:

- Police departments be notified immediately when a sex offender is released from prison or a hospital.
- Sex offenders be required to register with police departments as do narcotics addicts.
- Sex offenders be required to return to Menlo Park periodically for examinations.

"I realize the courts and the Legislature would take issue with me and accuse me of placing an unwarranted stigma upon sex offenders," Spina declared, "but, too often, I feel the individual is being protected at the expense of society."

"The Legislature and the courts couldn't begin to understand the manpower and the work that follows a sex crime until the offender is apprehended."

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Spina said closer police supervision of known offenders, made possible by their being required to register, would reduce the number of sex crimes.

"I know of two murders in Newark and several rapes that would have been prevented if this requirement were made part of the law," he added.

Whether or not the sex offender law will be revised is a moot point at this time, but providing state funds and facilities to carry out the law to the fullest is a definite 1966 goal for the Hughes Administration.

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