

OPINION: Concerned mother responds to finding out level 3 sex offender moved in next door

On February 7th, the Fairhaven police department made a public service announcement to inform the community about a level 3 sex offender living in it. The concern was *"that this individual has a moderate or high risk to re-offend and that the degree of dangerousness posed to the public is such that public safety interest is served by public availability of registration information."*

A level 3 sex offender is the highest tier of offense.

"Tier III categorizes those who are the **most dangerous or repetitive sex offenders**. Anyone convicted as a Tier II offender who reoffends is generally categorized in this third tier. These convictions are also punishable by one (1) or more years in prison. Offenses considered to be Tier III include:

- More severe or **aggravated sexual abuse or assault** (as compared to Tier II), or the **conspiracy to commit** such an offense;
- Engaging in a **sexual act by force or threat**;
- Engaging in a sexual act with another who is rendered **unconscious, is involuntarily drugged or who is otherwise [in]capable of making a sound decision** about the act or is unable to decline participation;
- Engaging in a **sexual act with a child under the age of 12**;
- For children under the age of 16, there are a variety of sexual acts defined in statute (see 18 U.S.C. 2246(2));
- Offenses noted in the Tier II section against whom the victim is 13 years of age or younger; and

- **Kidnapping of a minor** (there are exceptions related to parents and guardians).” – Source
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In response, a concerned mother, Tara O’Connell, responded and wanted her voice to be heard:

“An open letter to my new neighbor:

I first found out about you [sex offender] through texts and a Facebook post by the Fairhaven police department. It wasn’t

your picture that was scary to me – I give everyone the benefit of the doubt at first – it was the description of your status as level 3 that threw my heart into the bottom of my body.

I was initially overwhelmed by fear and thought about ways in which my 7 and 4 year old can be made aware of you without being frightened. Our yards connect and it simply **had to be discussed**. After our talk, as constructive as I thought it was, my son clung to me that night and wouldn't sleep in his room. I went to bed and thought about my neighborhood and how freely the children of Hamlet Homes can walk to and from the bus stop without fear because this is a neighborhood where children thrive.

This is a neighborhood where bikes are ridden, puddles are splashed in, and the first sign of street lights is when it is time to come home. This is a neighborhood where trees are climbed and branches are bounced on so high they could touch the sky. It's one where knees are skinned and dirt is a main component of our children's wardrobe in the summer. This is a strong neighborhood with deep roots, and a playful heart, and **your presence has darkened that**.

My next feeling was disgust. My fear of you does not stem from a place of unknowing and judgement. I know you are sick and overcome by evil, and though I do not feel bad for you in the least, I will still pray for you. But I will pray harder for the children's lives you have affected by your actions.

See my fear of you stems from a deep, dark place. Though a paper may state what level you are, it does not begin to describe the damage you have caused. I know, because I was a recipient of that damage. I was 10. I know what it is like to feel pushed in a corner by an overwhelming and unwanted presence. I know the pain and confusion a child feels when you decide to do what you do, to your victims. I know the pain all too well... the pain that takes years to heal and overcome. The

pain that throws road blocks in our growth as individuals, forms instant mountains in front of us and makes us feel unimaginable shame for something we had no control over.

There are endless repercussions and sadly they are on the victim. Those wounds will stay with us forever. I ask myself why? Why did you have to move next to us? Then I realize, in our system you are now free to do as you please. Hopefully you are trapped in a prison that is yourself, in the same way you have left your victims. Because what happens after molestation and the healing that comes after is like we are confined to a prison. The only freedom you will find is in God.

So out of fear...I was going to take down my daughters sheer flowery curtains that hang in her room that let the morning light seep through to wake my precious girl in exchange for dark ones but I said "No." I was going to refuse to let the loves of my life climb our tree in the back yard. The tree my daughter and her friends love to climb and sing in, that overlooks your yard, but I said "No."

My fence may go higher and our locks more secure, but I refuse to hold my children captive and change our life because you are my neighbor. I will now be a mama bear, and my need to protect now surpasses all other needs.

Our neighborhood will grow stronger, and our roots will grow deeper. You are an unwanted presence, but one we will overcome. We will teach our children about real threats in life, because sadly you are so close to home and we will look out for each other like we always have and hopefully soon you will move on to wherever it is you go.

Our neighborhood and our children will remain safe and we will make sure of that. All eyes are on you. I am not writing this to wish you unfair treatment. I am writing this to wish you everything that you deserve. .

Sincerely,

Your new neighbor.