

Sex Offender Registration and Monitoring Triennial Review - 2024

Report 24-11

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OPPAGA

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

Sex Offender Registration and Monitoring Triennial Review - 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Both federal and state law facilitate oversight of sex offenders and predators living in Florida communities, with state agencies and local law enforcement monitoring, registering, verifying, and providing information about sex offenders. Florida is one of 18 states that are substantially compliant with federal sex offender registry requirements.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement’s sex offender registry lists more than 86,000 offenders and predators, of which, over 30,000 reside in Florida communities. The majority (63%) of offenders on the registry are either confined or do not live in Florida. The number of sex offenders on Florida’s registry who live in other states has grown at a faster rate relative to registered sex offenders living in Florida communities. In 2024, several legislative, administrative, and judicial changes impacted sex offender registration practices. Sheriffs’ offices reported adopting various practices for registration and address verification to meet statutory obligations.

The transient offender population continues to present monitoring challenges and has grown since OPPAGA’s last review. Approximately 7% of registered sexual offenders and 12% of sexual predators living in Florida communities are homeless or transient, with rates varying by county and ranging from 0% to 34%. Sheriffs’ offices that reported transient populations often cited residence restrictions as a contributing factor to sex offender transience. While Florida statutes only place residence restrictions on certain offenders based on their conviction, local governments can impose city or county residence restrictions that further limit where some or all sex offenders can live. Most counties have at least one city or county sex offender ordinance, and the number of ordinances in place has increased across the state.

Sex offenders may be removed from Florida’s sex offender registry under certain circumstances. Federal law establishes a baseline for sex offender registries by creating a set of minimum national standards, including minimum time on the registry. Since 2021, approximately 2,500 individuals have been removed from Florida’s sex offender registry; most individuals removed were deceased.

REPORT SCOPE

As directed by s. 943.04353, *Florida Statutes*, OPPAGA studied the effectiveness of Florida’s sex offender registration process and public notification provisions.

BACKGROUND

State and federal law facilitates oversight of sexual offenders and predators living in Florida; several entities monitor these offenders

State and federal law establishes requirements for sex offender registration; Florida substantially complies with federal requirements

Florida law defines two categories of sex offenders: sexual offenders and sexual predators.¹ The court designates some offenders as predators because they are deemed to present an extreme threat to public safety. The Public Safety Information Act of 1997 created Florida's first online registry of sex offenders. The federal Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) provides a set of minimum national standards for sex offender registration and notification in the United States. These standards address elements such as immediate exchange of information, website registry requirements, and community notification.

Along with 17 other states, Florida is substantially compliant with SORNA requirements.² To verify compliance, the federal Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking reviews jurisdictional laws, policies, and procedures across 14 SORNA categories.³ Jurisdictions that fail to substantially implement SORNA requirements risk losing a portion of federal Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant funds. Criminal justice programs can use these funds to support a range of criminal justice purposes, including prevention and education; crime victim and witness programs; and planning, evaluation, and technology improvements. In federal Fiscal Year 2023, Florida law enforcement entities were allocated approximately \$18.8 million in Justice Assistance Grant funds.⁴ States substantially compliant with SORNA can also receive bonus funds from previous fiscal year funding reductions from non-compliant states. In federal Fiscal Year 2023, approximately \$2.7 million was available from such reductions; Florida received the largest bonus award—\$491,477.

Several entities have a role in monitoring sex offenders in Florida

Four state agencies along with local entities engage in activities related to monitoring sex offenders. These entities include the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV), Florida Department of Corrections (FDC), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and local law enforcement. The agencies' various activities include registering, verifying, and providing information to the public about sex offenders in the community. (See Exhibit 1.)

¹ In this report, the term sex offender refers to both sexual offenders and sexual predators unless stated otherwise.


² In addition, the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida were among 137 tribal jurisdictions in the United States found to be substantially compliant.

³ Categories include offenses and offenders on the registry, tracking and penalizing absconders, community notification, appearance and verification, and information sharing.

⁴ County and municipal governments are also eligible to receive Justice Assistance Grants. In federal Fiscal Year 2023, approximately \$7.5 million was allocated to local governments in Florida.


Exhibit 1

Florida's Monitoring of Sex Offenders Consists of Four Main Activities



Registration

Sex offenders required to register must do so in person with the **sheriff** in the county where they live within 48 hours of establishing a residence or experiencing any change of information required by statute. These offenders must also re-register two or four times a year based on their conviction(s) and status. The offender must provide information such as their physical description, addresses, and vehicle descriptions. The **FDLE** maintains this information on the sex offender registry.




Identification

All sex offenders required to register must also obtain a driver license or identification card from the **DHSMV** within 48 hours of registration and notify the department within 48 hours of any change in address. Per Florida statute, driver licenses and identification cards issued to registered sex offenders display distinctive information identifying their registration status.¹



Address Verification

The **FDC**, the **FDLE**, and **local law enforcement entities** are responsible for verifying sex offender addresses in a manner that is consistent with federal laws and standards to ensure that sex offenders can be found at their registered address.



Community Notification

The **FDLE** is responsible for statewide notification efforts. The department informs the public of the location of sex offenders and provides information via the online sex offender registry and toll-free nationwide hotline. Local law enforcement agencies are also required to notify the public of the presence of sexual predators living in their communities. Within 48 hours, law enforcement agencies must notify licensed childcare centers and schools within a one-mile radius of the predator's residence.

Local sheriffs, the **FDC**, or the **DJJ** if an offender is on community supervision, are also required to notify institutions of higher education when a sex offender enrolls, is employed, or volunteers at an institution.

¹ Sections [322.141\(3\)](#) and [\(4\)](#), *F.S.*

Source: OPPAGA review of *Florida Statutes*.

FDLE maintains the Florida Sexual Offender and Predator System (SOPS), a database that houses statewide sex offender information and populates the publicly accessible Florida sex offender registry. As of October 2024, there were 86,207 sex offenders on the registry. SOPS also provides information on sex offenders in Florida to other criminal justice information systems, including the Florida Crime Information Center (FCIC), National Crime Information Center (NCIC), and National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR).⁵ When a new sex offender is added to the registry, a sex offender status flag is automatically created in FCIC and NCIC, and sex offender registration data is available to law enforcement across the state and country. Flags in FCIC and NCIC are used to highlight critical information to law enforcement officers, such as outstanding warrants, missing persons with specific vulnerabilities, or stolen vehicles with potential danger. Law enforcement officers may conduct queries in FCIC and NCIC using specific search characteristics such as name, address, or license plate number. A sex offender status flag in FCIC and NCIC serves as an indicator to law enforcement that a specific search result is associated with a registered sex offender.

SOPS also has a mobile device app—LEMobile—for law enforcement agencies to assist with sex offender registry related activities. Among other functions, LEMobile provides a list of sex offenders

⁵ FCIC is a statewide, local-level information system tied directly to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's NCIC in Washington D.C. NCIC is a computerized index of criminal justice information, including criminal record history information, fugitives, stolen properties, and missing persons. It is available to federal, state, and local law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies and is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. NSOR is a national database maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which compiles information from the registration jurisdictions' sex offender registries and makes it available to criminal justice agencies on a nationwide basis. Public access to national sex offender data is provided on the [Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public Website](#), a partnership between the U.S. Department of Justice and state, territorial, and tribal governments.

due for address verifications in the user's county and allows officers conducting address verifications to update the registry in the field through their mobile device. Other LEMobile functions include address verification requests for specific offenders and a list of all offender and predator residences in a one- to four-mile radius of the user's location or an address.

Some sex offenders living in Florida communities are monitored by the Department of Corrections

Some sex offenders living in Florida communities are under court-imposed supervision or probation. (See Exhibit 2.) While on probation, offenders must adhere to specified conditions for an established period or they can receive a sanction from the court, such as incarceration. As of October 2024, FDC supervised 6,079 sex offenders residing in Florida communities.^{6,7} The majority of these offenders are monitored on sex offender probation, an intensive form of supervision that requires sex offender treatment and close monitoring to ensure compliance with special conditions and sex offender registration requirements. Also, some sex offenders are conditionally released into the community from the Sexually Violent Predator Program's Florida Civil Commitment Center under stipulated agreement contracts.⁸ In addition to community supervision, some sex offenders may also be required to be electronically monitored; this entails offenders wearing an electronic monitoring device that tracks the person's location. As of November 2024, 67% of sex offenders on FDC community supervision were on active electronic monitoring.

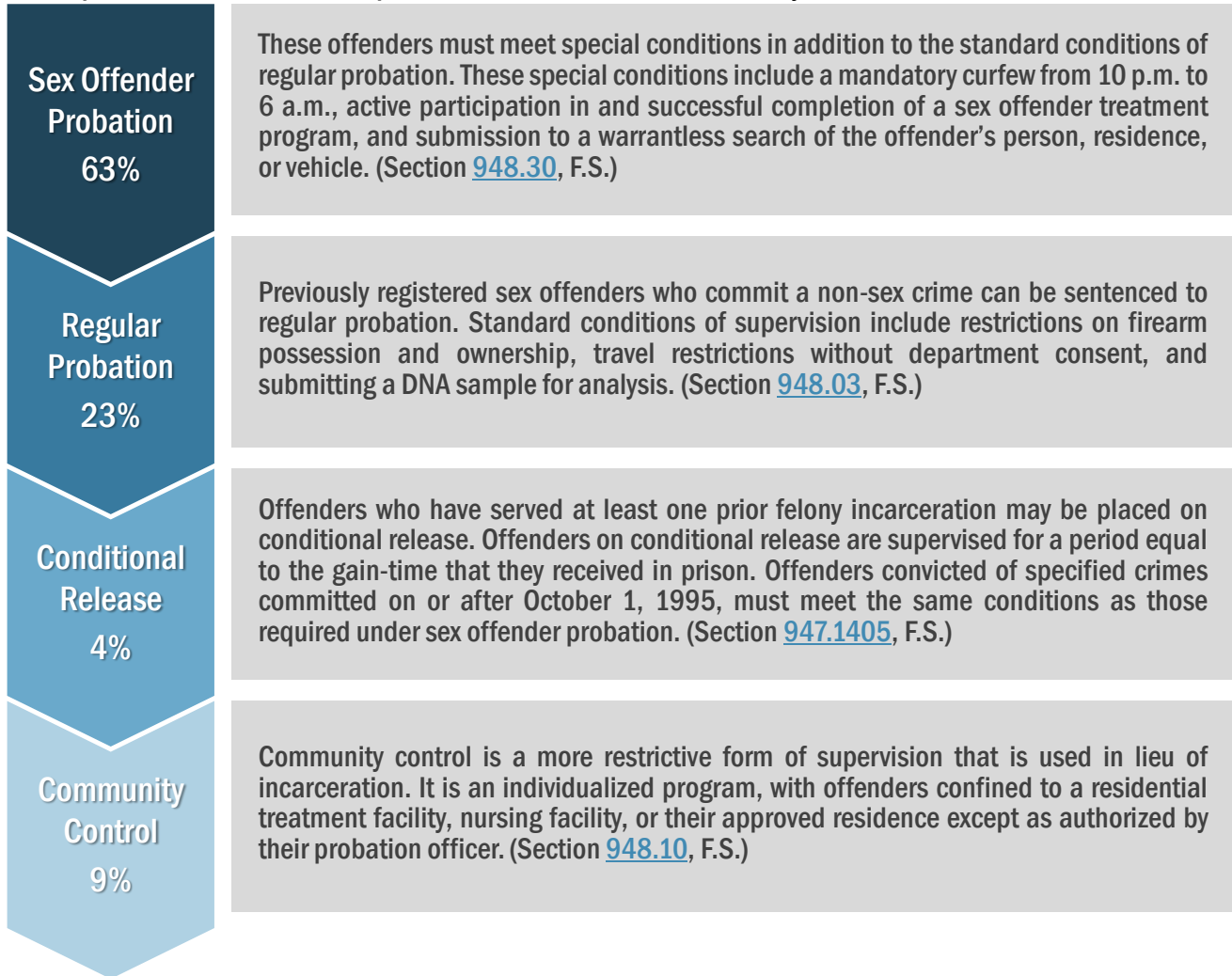
⁶ As of October 2024, FDC monitored an additional 3,430 sex offenders on active-suspense status. These offenders are temporarily unavailable for direct supervision due to being in jail, in federal custody, on Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainer pending deportation, in prison, or pending transfer out of state; however, the offender is still being monitored by a probation officer.

⁷ In Florida, 715 sex offenders were supervised under federal probation and 7 offenders were supervised by the Department of Juvenile Justice.

⁸ Sexually violent predators are sexual offenders who, due to their criminal history and the presence of mental abnormality, are found likely to engage in future acts of sexual violence if not confined in a secure facility for long-term control, care, and treatment. The Jimmy Ryce Involuntary Civil Commitment for Sexually Violent Predators' Treatment and Care Act, Ch. [394 Part V, F.S.](#), provides for the civil confinement of such offenders until they have been judged fit for release from custody. These offenders are confined at the Florida Civil Commitment Center.

Exhibit 2

The Department of Corrections Supervises Sex Offenders in Different Ways



Source: Florida Department of Corrections.

Over 30,000 registered sex offenders live in Florida communities

FDLE's sex offender registry lists over 86,000 offenders, but most do not reside in Florida communities

FDLE's registry included 86,207 sex offenders as of October 2024. (See Exhibit 3.) Only 30,907 (36%) of sexual offenders and predators on the registry resided in Florida communities, and 54,207 (63%) were either confined or not residing in the state. Additionally, 1,093 (1%) registered sex offenders have absconded, and their whereabouts were unknown.

Exhibit 3

More Than 60% of Registered Sex Offenders Do Not Live in Florida Communities

Status		Sexual Offenders ¹	Sexual Predators	All
Living in Florida Communities	Sentence Served - Required to Register	21,448	2,687	24,135
	Community Supervision	5,133	1,639	
	Department of Corrections	4,421	1,629	
	Department of Juvenile Justice	7	0	
	Federal	705	10	6,772
	Subtotal	26,581	4,326	30,907
Not Living in Florida Communities	Confined	11,331	9,411	
	Incarcerated	11,181	9,042	
	Civilly Committed	150	369	20,742
	Non-Florida Residents	31,086	2,379	33,465
	Subtotal	42,417	11,790	54,207
Absconded ²	Absconded Offenders	963	130	1,093
	Subtotal	963	130	1,093
Total Persons on Registry as of October 2024		69,961	16,246	86,207

Note: The registry also included 1,521 deceased persons: 1,215 sex offenders and 306 sexual predators whose names remain on the registry for one year following their death so that victims can see that they have been reported as deceased. OPPAGA excluded deceased persons from the analysis.

¹ Juvenile sex offenders are included in the sex offender category. There are 515 juvenile sex offenders on Florida's registry.

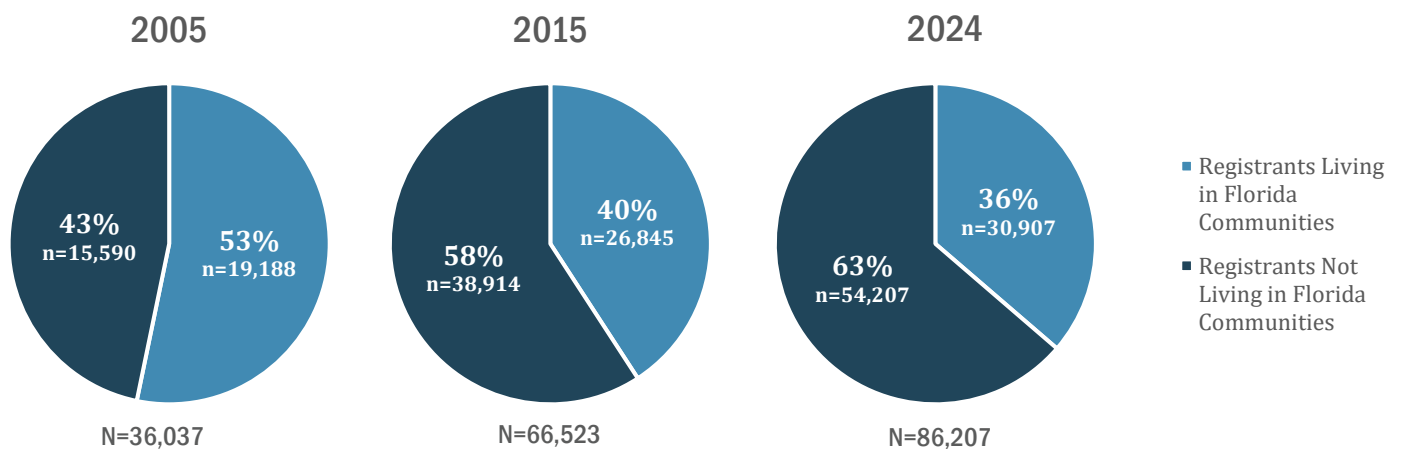
² Absconded offenders may or may not be in Florida communities as their whereabouts are unknown.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data, October 2024.

Since OPPAGA's first sex offender registration review in 2005, the overall number of sex offenders on the registry—including registrants living in Florida communities, non-Florida resident registrants, registrants in confinement, and absconders—has grown by 139% (from 36,037 in 2005 to 86,207 in 2024), whereas the number of sex offenders in Florida communities has grown by 61% (from 19,188 to 30,907 during the same period). Thus, the proportion of sex offenders on the registry that reside in Florida communities has declined over the past 19 years. (See Exhibit 4.)

Exhibit 4

The Proportion of Sex Offender Registrants Living in Florida Communities Has Declined Over the Past 19 Years¹



¹These charts do not add up to 100% because the charts exclude absconded offenders. Absconded offenders may or may not be living in Florida communities.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data, October 2024.

Sex offenders are required to report residential addresses when registering or upon changing addresses. Florida statutes define permanent, temporary, and transient residential addresses.⁹

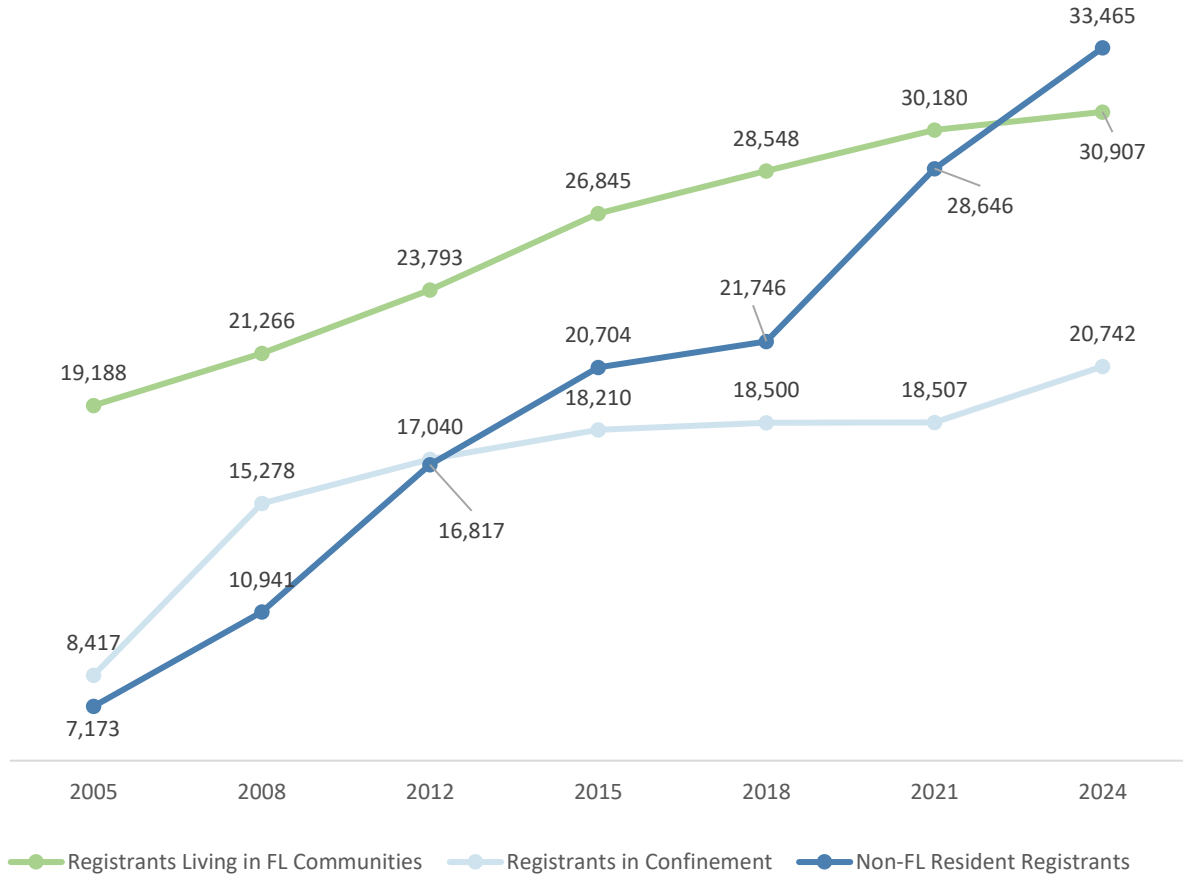
- **Permanent:** a place where the person abides, lodges, or resides for three or more consecutive days. For the purpose of calculating a permanent residence, the first day that a person abides, lodges, or resides at a place is excluded and each subsequent day is counted. A day includes any part of a calendar day.
- **Temporary:** a place where the person abides, lodges, or resides, including but not limited to vacation, business, or personal travel destinations in or out of Florida, for a period of three or more days in the aggregate during any calendar year and that is not the person's permanent address or, for a person whose permanent residence is not in Florida, a place where the person is employed, practices a vocation, or is enrolled as a student for any period in this state. For the purpose of calculating a temporary residence, the first day that a person abides, lodges, or resides at a place is excluded and each subsequent day is counted. A day includes any part of a calendar day.
- **Transient:** a county where the person lives, remains, or is located for the purpose of abiding, lodging, or residing for a period of three or more days in the aggregate during a calendar year and that is not the person's permanent or temporary address. The term includes but is not limited to a place where the person sleeps or seeks shelter and a location that has no specific street address. For the purpose of calculating a transient residence, the first day that a person lives, remains, or is located in a county for the purpose of abiding, lodging, or residing is excluded and each subsequent day is counted. A day includes any part of a calendar day.

The number of sex offenders on Florida's registry who live in other states has grown at a faster rate relative to registered sex offenders living in Florida communities. (See Exhibit 5.) The number of out-of-state offenders on the registry now exceeds the number of registered sex offenders living in Florida communities. Over the past three years, the number of out-of-state registrants grew by 17% (28,646 to 33,465), while the number of in-state registrants grew by 2% (30,180 to 30,907).

⁹ Section [775.21](#), F.S.

Exhibit 5

Non-Florida Residents Comprise a Greater Share of Florida’s Sex Offender Registry Than Individuals Living in the State

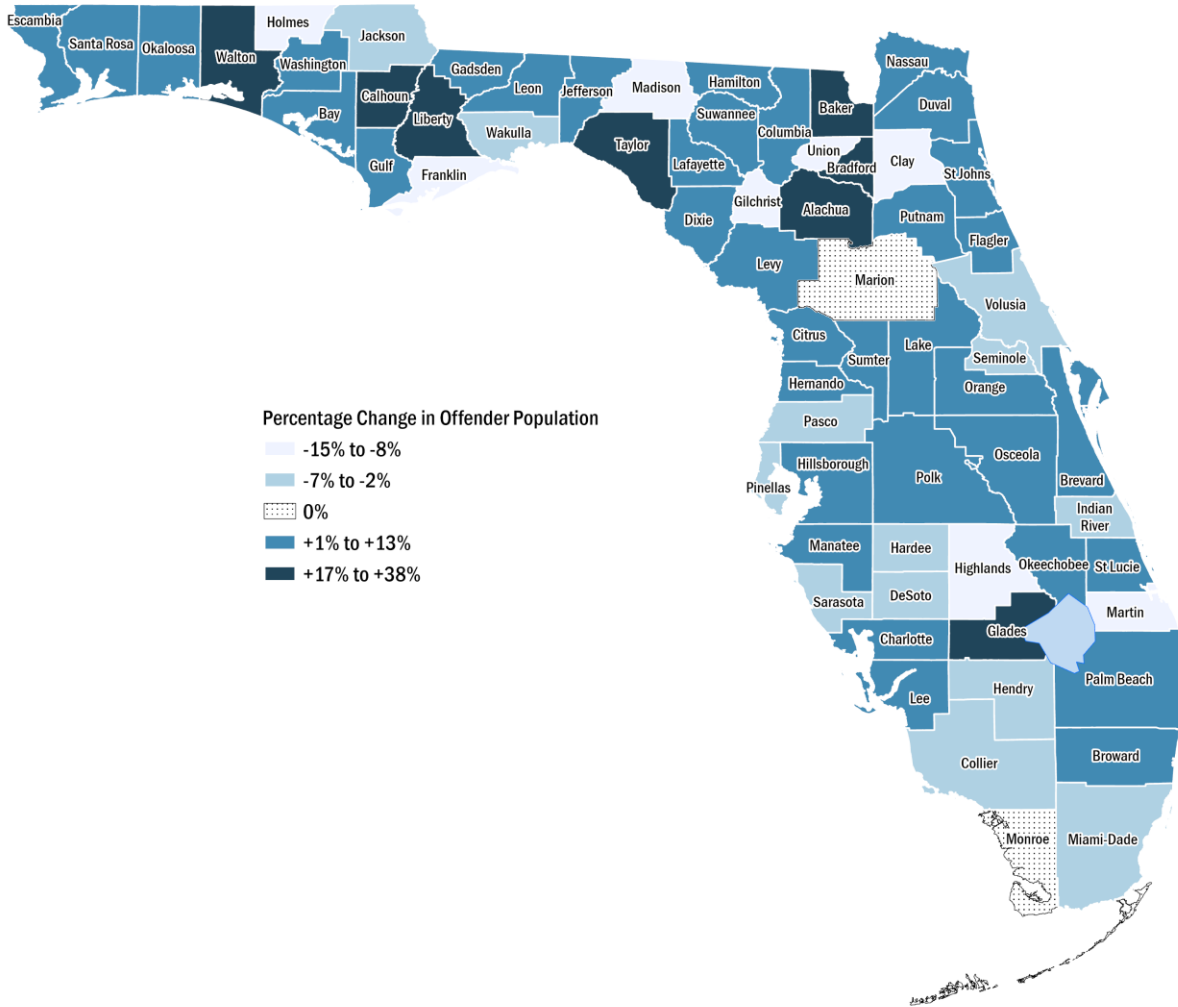


Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data, 2005 to 2024.

The number of registered sex offenders in the community has also varied across the state. Twenty-one counties experienced a decline in the sex offender population between 2021 and 2024. (See Exhibit 6.) The greatest declines in the number of sex offenders in the community between 2021 and 2024 were in Highlands, Holmes, and Union counties. The greatest increases were in Baker, Calhoun, and Taylor counties; however, these results should be interpreted cautiously because these counties had relatively few sex offenders overall. (See Appendix A for the number of registered sex offenders in Florida communities by county in 2021 and 2024.)

Exhibit 6

Twenty-One Counties Experienced a Decline in County Sex Offender Population Between 2021 and 2024



Note: Changes in population are based on registered sex offenders with a permanent or a transient address (if they do not have a permanent address) within a county. Registered sex offenders in confinement were not included in this analysis.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data 2021-2024.

FINDINGS

In 2024, several changes impacted sex offender registration requirements

The 2024 Legislature passed Ch. 2024-73, *Laws of Florida*, which amended the sexual offender and sexual predator statutes to modify the definition of residences, reporting requirements for registrants, and provisions related to the review process for offenders seeking relief from registration.^{10,11} The law clarified the 30-day required transient offender check-ins, definitions for permanent, temporary, and transient residences as the definitions apply to sexual offender and predator registration, and reporting requirements for sheriffs and local jails. The law also required sheriffs to electronically

¹⁰ Sections [943.0435](#) and [775.21](#), *F.S.*

¹¹ These requirements went into effect October 1, 2024.

submit to FDLE the addresses and locations where sex offenders maintain a transient residence within two business days after a sexual offender or predator provides such information to the sheriff's office.¹² Lastly, based on the outcome of a federal court case, sex offenders are no longer required to report in-state travel that resulted in a temporary address change in person to DHSMV.¹³ (See Exhibit 7.)

Exhibit 7

Several Changes Were Made to Florida's Sex Offender Registration Requirements in 2024

Both sexual offender and predator statutes were amended to...

- clarify that any travel outside Florida with the intent of establishing a permanent, temporary, or transient residence must be reported in person to the sheriff at least 48 hours before the registrant intends to travel;
- specify that both sexual offenders and sexual predators who fail to respond to any address verification correspondence from a county or local law enforcement agency within a specified period commit a third-degree felony;
- allow registrants not under supervision with FDC or the Department of Juvenile Justice to update any changes to vehicles owned with FDLE through the department's Cyber Communication System, in lieu of reporting this information in person to the sheriff's office; and
- standardize transient check-ins and reporting.

The sexual offender statute was amended to ...

- require that FDLE receive notice of a petition for removal of sexual offender registration requirements three weeks prior to a hearing and to authorize FDLE to present evidence in opposition to such a petition; and
- clarify that the custodian of the local jail is required to register a sexual offender, in custody, within three business days after their intake and upon their release and forward such registration to FDLE.

As a result of the federal court case *Harper v. Glass*...

- sexual offenders are no longer required to report permanent or temporary address changes to DHSMV unless the address change mandates the reissue of a new driver license/identification card bearing the new address; and
- sexual offenders, not sexual predators, were permitted to use the Cyber Communication System to report in-state travel to the sheriff's office.

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

FDLE updated the Sexual Offender and Predator System

FDLE took steps to address findings of a 2022 Federal Bureau of Investigation SOPS audit

In 2022, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conducted an audit of Florida's Sexual Offender and Predator System to assess the state's compliance with National Sex Offender Registry data requirements. Florida's SOPS provides sex offender registration information to the Florida Crime

¹² Sections [775.21\(6\)\(g\)2.b.](#) and [943.0435\(4\)\(b\)2.](#), *F.S.*

¹³ *Harper v. Glass*, 4:21cv85-RH-MJF (N.D. Fla. 2024). The resulting court order declared as unconstitutional a portion of s. [943.0435\(4\)\(a\)](#), *F.S.*, that requires a sexual offender to report in person to DHSMV any change of permanent residence or temporary residence, as defined in ss. [775.21\(2\)\(k\)](#) and [775.21\(2\)\(n\)](#), *F.S.*, which do not require the department to issue a replacement driver license or state identification card with the offender's new address.

Information Center that is tied directly to the FBI's National Crime Information Center. When a new sexual offender or predator registers and is added to SOPS, a sex offender status flag is added to the relevant record in FCIC/NCIC as being associated with a registered sex offender. Registered offenders are required to provide identifying information about their person (e.g., sex, race, height), their place of residence, telephone number, and email address, as well as vehicles owned by the offender. When a law enforcement officer queries FCIC or NCIC using identifying information, such as a person's name, address, or vehicle information, the officer will receive a notification that the search is associated with a registered sex offender, and other identifying information associated with that sex offender will be returned in the search.¹⁴ The FBI's data quality review examined a limited number of records (30) and resulted in two findings of noncompliance regarding FCIC/NCIC flags.

- **First finding:** 90% of the sample sex offender records in SOPS contained additional information that should have been entered into NSOR but was not. Fields not entered included county; city; ZIP code; conviction resulting in registration; state identification numbers; scars, marks, tattoos, and other characteristics; and social security number.
 - FDLE acknowledged deficiencies in system programming related to state identification numbers as well as city, county, and ZIP codes for transient registrants. The department completed computer system programming to allow for this information to be captured in June 2023.
 - Issues with the three other fields—conviction resulting in registration; scars, marks, tattoos, and other characteristics; and social security number—were determined to be non-system related and occurred in a small subset of reviewed records. FDLE addressed these through enhanced and reinforced user training.
- **Second finding:** Not all records were being validated. Records for offenders who are incarcerated, absconded, deported, deceased, and/or moved out-of-state are validated via an automated process. However, due to a system issue, auditors discovered that over 1,000 records did not go through the automated validation process.
 - FDLE determined that records without social security numbers were not programmed to be validated and corrected the error prior to the audit's conclusion.

FDLE updated SOPS FCIC/NCIC flags in response to audit findings. These changes went into effect December 2023 and resulted in the following information being added to FCIC/NCIC flags: active emails; active internet identifiers; additional active residential and non-residential addresses; active university/campus information; additional telephone numbers; employment—active employer names and occupations; active professional licenses; and active vehicle information.

In addition to changes made subsequent to the FBI audit, FDLE updated other aspects of SOPS

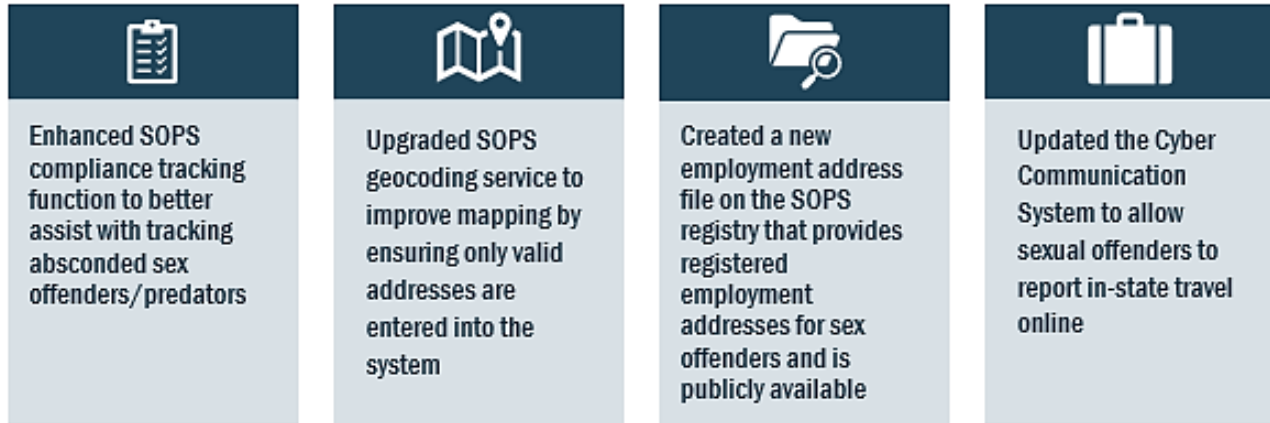
Since OPPAGA's 2021 review, FDLE updated SOPS, including changes to the public facing registry and updates to the Cyber Communication System that populates the SOPS registry.¹⁵ (See Exhibit 8.)

¹⁴ Additional information available to law enforcement via an FCIC/NCIC search include scars, marks, and tattoos; employer; occupation; professional license(s) number and type; social security number; offense type; crime location; and age and sex of the victim.

¹⁵ The Cyber Communication System is an online system that a sexual offender or sexual predator who is not on FDC or Florida Department of Juvenile Justice supervision may use to report changes in email addresses; internet identifiers; telephone numbers; employment; and status of enrollment, volunteering, or employment at institutions of higher education in Florida.

Exhibit 8

FDLE Updated the Sexual Offender and Predator System



Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

Sheriffs' offices monitor registered sex offenders in the community; transient registrants continue to present challenges

Local practices for monitoring sex offenders vary by county

Local law enforcement monitors all registered sex offenders including offenders on FDC supervision. Sheriffs' offices have statutory requirements for offender registration, address verification, and public notification. Sheriffs' offices responding to OPPAGA's survey reported fulfilling these requirements with some variations in local practices.¹⁶ There are similarities in monitoring sex offenders across sheriffs' offices. For example, 88% have one county sex offender registration location. However, local practices differ in terms of hours available for registering and registration cost, frequency of face-to-face address verification, and methods of notifying the public about sex offenders.

Registration hours and cost. Most registration locations operated by sheriffs' offices provide registration five or more days a week, with 13 locations open four or fewer days a week. Fifty-seven percent of the locations are open for registration during regular business hours, 20% of the locations are open 24/7, two locations are open for 12 hours on operating days, and the remaining locations have more limited hours.

Seven sheriffs' offices reported requiring offenders to pay for registration or re-registration. Initial registration costs ranged from \$15 to \$75, and re-registration costs ranged from \$5 to \$25. Four respondents reported returning collected fees to either city or county general funds, one reported returning fees to a general fund to offset the cost related to the registration unit, and one reported using fees to contribute to the operational expenses of registration.

Address verification. Florida law requires local law enforcement to verify sex offender addresses in a manner consistent with the federal standard of regular face-to-face contact. All sheriffs' offices conduct more than one address verification per year, with 54% conducting address verifications for sexual predators three or more times per year, and 40% conducting address verifications for sexual offenders twice per year. Twenty-six offices reported using FDLE's LEMobile app while conducting

¹⁶ OPPAGA sent surveys to all 67 sheriffs' offices and received responses from 50 offices, for a response rate of 75%. Some sheriffs' offices did not respond to all survey questions, resulting in lower responses for some questions.

face-to-face address verifications. Of those offices, 24 reported that the app made the address verification process more efficient than the offices' previous methods. Suggestions for improvement included allowing vehicle verification in the app, making it compatible with OffenderWatch, including information on the date and nature of convictions, and auto populating the app with active warrants.¹⁷

Public notification. Sheriffs' offices use different methods to notify the public, schools, and childcare facilities about sexual predators. Sheriffs' offices must notify schools and childcare facilities when a sexual predator moves within a one-mile radius.¹⁸ Offices reported notifying schools and childcare facilities through face-to-face contact with facility administrators (40%), letters (34%), email (28%), or telephone calls (18%).¹⁹ Sheriffs' offices must notify the public when a sexual predator moves into a county. Most sheriffs' offices reported notifying the public via their websites.²⁰

Transient offenders continue to present monitoring challenges to sheriffs' offices

As of October 1, 2024, approximately 7% of registered sexual offenders and 12% of sexual predators in Florida communities had a transient address as their primary location, which indicates that they are reporting that they are homeless. Homelessness rates among sex offenders vary by county. Broward and Miami-Dade counties have the highest rates with 34% and 31% of registered sex offenders, respectively, reporting only a transient address. Eighteen counties had no registered sex offenders reporting only a transient address.

The transient offender population has grown since OPPAGA's 2021 review, when 6% of sexual offenders and 9% of sexual predators had primary transient addresses; Miami-Dade and Broward counties had the highest number of transient offenders at that time.²¹ Of the sheriffs' offices that reported transient populations in OPPAGA's 2024 survey, 58% indicated that the number of transient sex offenders has increased over time, and 35% indicated that the number has remained stable. Half of the respondents who reported stable transient sex offender populations stated that they had very few transient offenders in their counties. (See Exhibit 9 for the number of transient registered sex offenders by county.) (See Appendix B for additional information about the number of registered sex offenders and transient offenders by county.)

¹⁷ OffenderWatch offers sex offender registry monitoring tools that provide a secure hosted environment for agencies to collaborate between jurisdictions, share a common record, and automatically update the public.

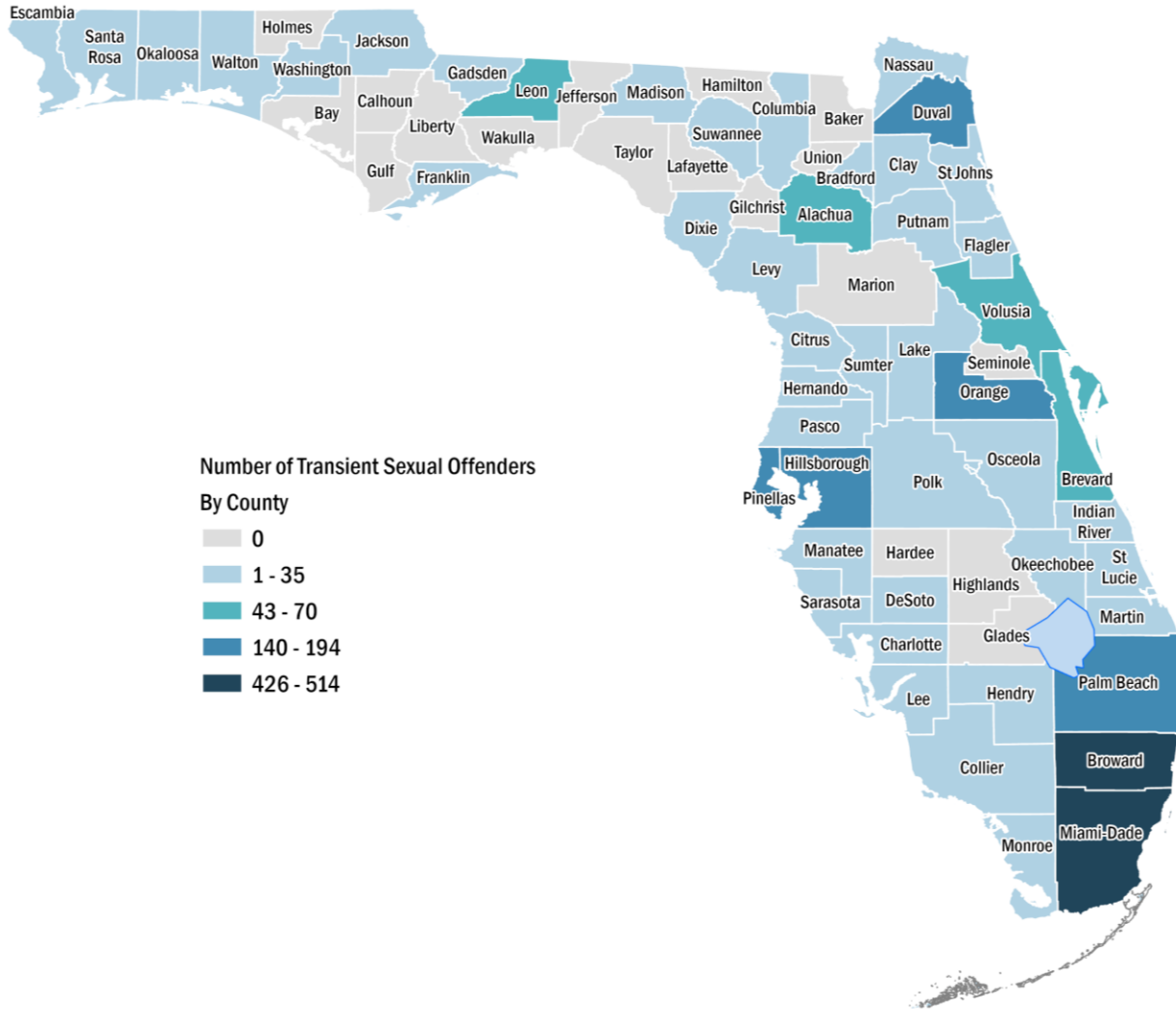
¹⁸ Chiefs of police have the same statutory public notification requirements as sheriffs when sexual predators move into their municipalities and when sexual predators reside within a one-mile radius of a school or childcare facility.

¹⁹ Two agencies reported using each of the following methods to notify schools and childcare facilities when a sexual predator moves within a one-mile radius of the facility: OffenderWatch, emails, school resource officers, and notification through FDLE. Other reported methods included agency fliers, social media, public announcements, Safe Schools Division, and Code Red. Code Red is a web-based emergency notification system that local public safety officials use to communicate with residents and businesses. One respondent who selected the "other" option reported no school and childcare facility notification practices.

²⁰ Other public notifications included Code Red, Reverse 911, mailings, and FDLE. One respondent reported using a book at their office, and another reported using an app created by their agency. Four respondents who selected the "other" option reported no public notification practices.

²¹ *Sex Offender Registration and Monitoring Triennial Review - 2021*, OPPAGA Report [21-10](#), December 2021.

Exhibit 9 Forty-nine Counties Have Transient Sex Offenders



Note: A registered sex offender was counted as transient if they had a transient address on the registry and did not have a permanent address.
Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data, September 2024.

Transient offenders are required to check in every 30 days. In 2014, the Legislature required transient sex offenders to visit the sheriff's office in person every 30 days in addition to the three- or six-month registration to verify transient residence information. Transient offenders who do not check in every 30 days can be charged with a third-degree felony. Most (93%) sheriffs' offices that responded to OPPAGA's survey and monitor transient offenders reported that locating and contacting transient offenders was challenging, and a little over half reported that these challenges have remained constant over time. Several sheriffs' offices stated that contacting homeless offenders was difficult because the offenders moved location frequently.

Local ordinances dictate where sex offenders reside and may restrict their movement and activities in the community

While Florida statutes only prohibit certain offenders convicted of a crime against a victim less than 16 years of age from living within 1,000 feet of any school, childcare facility, park, or playground, local governments can impose city or county residence restrictions that further prohibit where some or all sex offenders can live.²² For example, in some jurisdictions, certain offenders cannot live within 2,500 feet of any school, designated public school bus stop, day care center, park, playground, or other place where children regularly congregate. Some ordinances include additional locations such as public libraries, churches, and public beaches.²³

Local ordinances may also restrict sex offender movement or activities. Some communities have established no loitering or child safety zones. These ordinances restrict sexual predators from loitering within a specified distance of places where children congregate. These areas can include public beaches, water parks, skating rinks, zoos, and video arcades. At least five jurisdictions have ordinances addressing sex offenders' use of emergency shelters—Citrus, Hendry, Lafayette, and Marion counties and the City of West Palm Beach. These ordinances stipulate that sex offenders will be assigned to a temporary shelter specifically designated for use by sex offenders, typically the local jail or another correctional facility.²⁴

Most counties have at least one county or city sex offender ordinance; the number of ordinances has increased

As of September 2024, there were 196 local sex offender ordinances in Florida (city and county). Statewide, 129 cities (31%) had at least one ordinance.²⁵ The number of city ordinances varied widely by the county in which the city is located. Counties most commonly had one to two city ordinances. However, three counties had significantly more city ordinances—Broward (29), Palm Beach (16), and Volusia (13). Statewide, 32 counties (48%) had city ordinances. Forty-three counties (64%) had ordinances that were countywide or covered all unincorporated areas. Overall, 52 counties (78%) had at least one city or county sex offender ordinance within their jurisdiction. (See Exhibit 10.)

²² Section [775.215, F.S.](#)

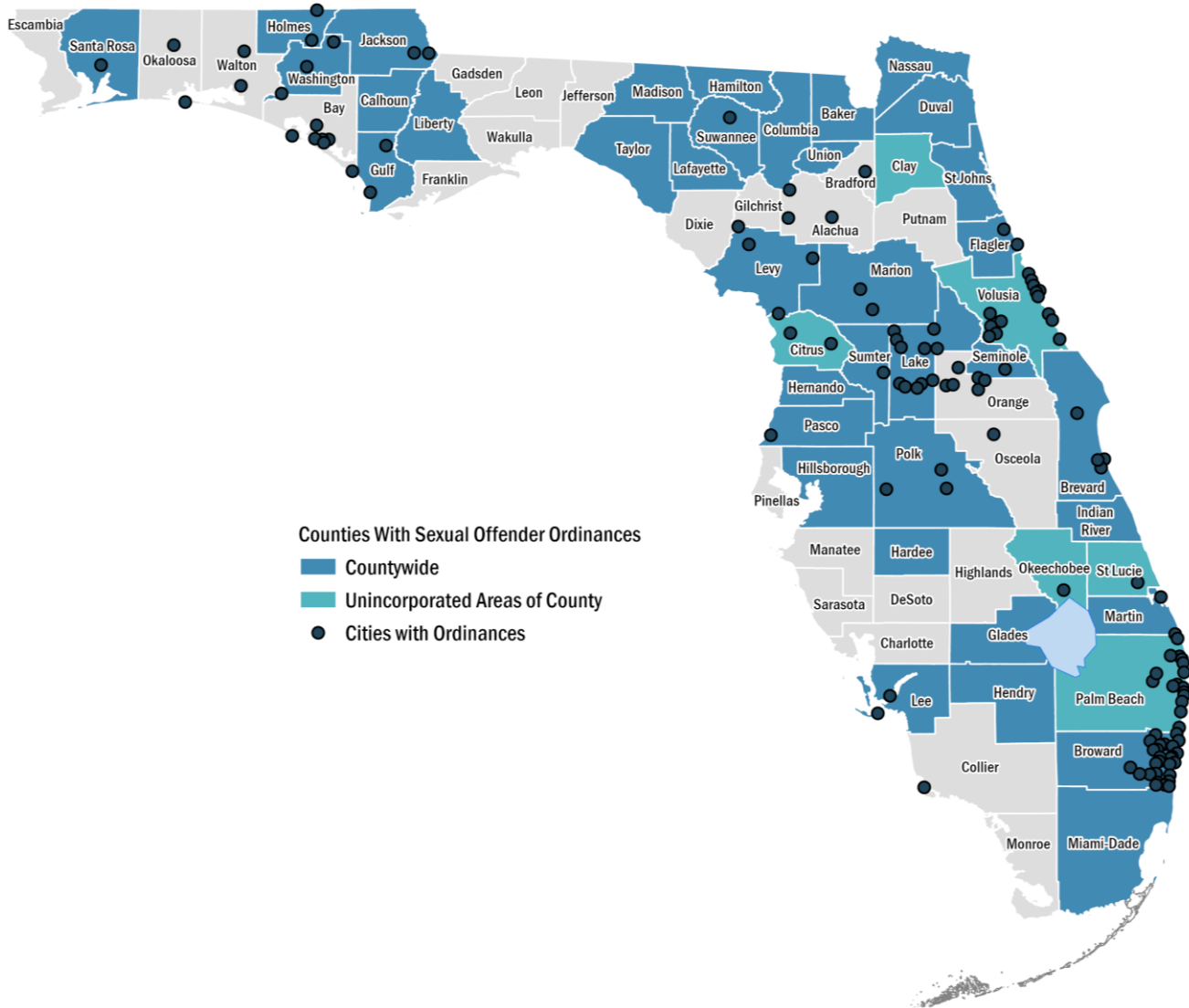
²³ One community established senior safety zones to prevent predators from living within a specified distance of places where seniors reside.

²⁴ Lafayette County's ordinance stipulates that sex offenders may be assigned a temporary shelter specifically designated for use by sexual predators and sexual offenders.

²⁵ According to the Florida League of Cities, the state has 411 municipalities.

Exhibit 10

Fifty-two Counties Have Ordinances That Restrict Sex Offender Activities and Place of Residence



Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Corrections data.

The number of sex offender ordinances has increased over time, with the Department of Corrections reporting an additional 19 ordinances since OPPAGA’s last analysis of local ordinances in 2018.²⁶ Some of these ordinances were in cities or counties that previously did not have a sex offender ordinance, while others were additional restrictions imposed in jurisdictions that already had such ordinances. For example, five cities—Chipley, Crestview, Esto, New Smyrna Beach, and Vernon—did not have city ordinances in November 2018 but had passed one by September 2024. Eleven counties—Clay, Columbia, Hernando, Holmes, Jackson, Lake, Marion, Martin, Pasco, Volusia, and Washington—did not have countywide ordinances in November 2018 but had passed one by September 2024.

Stakeholders expressed concerns about sex offender residence restrictions

Over half of sheriffs’ offices that reported transient populations cited increased cost of living as a contributing factor to sex offender transience, and 33% cited residency restrictions as a contributing

²⁶ *Sex Offender Registration and Monitoring Triennial Review – 2018*, [Report 18-08](#), December 2018.

factor. Other reported contributing factors included the stigma associated with sex offense convictions, mental health issues, suspected manipulation of registry requirements, and personal preference.

As required by statute, OPPAGA sought input from the Florida Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (FATSA) and the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence (FCASV) for this review. Both organizations expressed concerns about sex offender residence restrictions. According to FATSA, such ordinances can be a barrier to needed care, preventing aged sex offenders from living with family or in an assisted living care facility. Similarly, residence restrictions can prevent offenders with substance use or mental health issues from being able to participate in needed residential treatment. Untreated substance use, as well as mental health issues, can be a risk factor for reoffending. FCASV reported to OPPAGA that residence restrictions make members of the public feel better but may not actually promote public safety. Additionally, the council posited that residence restrictions make it difficult for sex offenders to find jobs and homes, which does not support public safety.

FDLE assists local law enforcement in locating sex offender absconders; conviction rates for registration violations have declined over the past 10 years

Two FDLE units focus on absconder and failure to register cases

The Offender Enforcement and Apprehension Unit (OEA) is composed of nine non-sworn positions, all assigned to FDLE headquarters in Tallahassee. The Investigations and Enforcement Unit (IE) is composed of five sworn positions—one special agent supervisor and four inspectors located in different FDLE regions throughout the state.²⁷ The OEA and IE units assist local law enforcement in locating sex offender absconders through special operations, intelligence gathering, and field support. (See Exhibit 11.) According to FDLE staff, the units conducted 22 operations with local law enforcement in 2024.

Exhibit 11

The FDLE Offender Enforcement and Apprehension and The Investigation and Enforcement Units Perform Several Sex Offender Related Activities

			
Investigate cases when an offender has failed to register but has obtained a Florida driver license	Monitor sex offenders moving in and out of the state	Conduct checks to make sure all vehicles at a sex offender's address have been reported to the registry	Accept information from citizens and other states' sheriffs and sex offender registries

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

Since 2005, absconders have represented between 3.5% and 1.1% of Florida's registry population. (See Exhibit 12.) As of September 2024, absconders accounted for 1.3% (1,093) of Florida's sex offender registry. Since 2012, the percentage of absconders on the registry has remained relatively stable (between 1.1% and 1.3%). While the number of absconders in the state has remained relatively

²⁷ The inspectors are located in Tallahassee, Gainesville, Lakeland, and Orlando.

stable over time, FDLE cited higher concentrations of absconders in the Miami region as a motivating factor for requesting additional sworn officers. Specifically, to achieve the goal of having sworn inspectors in each of its seven regions, FDLE requested four additional sworn inspectors in its 2025 legislative budget request. Dedicated inspectors in each region can assist local law enforcement with verifying addresses, conducting operations, locating absconders, and providing training.

Exhibit 12

Rates of Absconders on the Registry Has Remained Stable Since 2012

OPPAGA Report Year	Number of Absconders	Percentage of Absconders on the Registry
2005	1,259	3.5%
2008	861	1.8%
2012	693	1.2%
2015	764	1.1%
2018	849	1.2%
2021	1,024	1.3%
2024	1,093	1.3%

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data, 2005 to 2024.

FDLE inspectors often assist sheriffs' offices with sex offender registry related activities

Fifty-two percent of sheriffs' offices responding to OPPAGA's survey reported carrying out sex offender registry related activities in collaboration with FDLE inspectors. Activities most often included address verifications (50%) and registration violation investigations (46%). Other activities conducted in collaboration with FDLE included special seasonal operations, designated compliance operations, assistance notifying offenders of their responsibility to register, and different FDLE led operations.

Twenty-one sheriffs' offices provided additional feedback on experiences working with FDLE inspectors. The reported division of labor varied by activity. Roughly 43% of respondents described address verifications as joint efforts between the sheriff's office and FDLE. Thirty-three percent reported that the sheriff's office took the primary role with FDLE providing assistance. Sheriffs' offices reported that FDLE more frequently assumed a supportive role, providing assistance as needed when investigating registration violation cases.

Fewer registration violation arrests are resulting in convictions

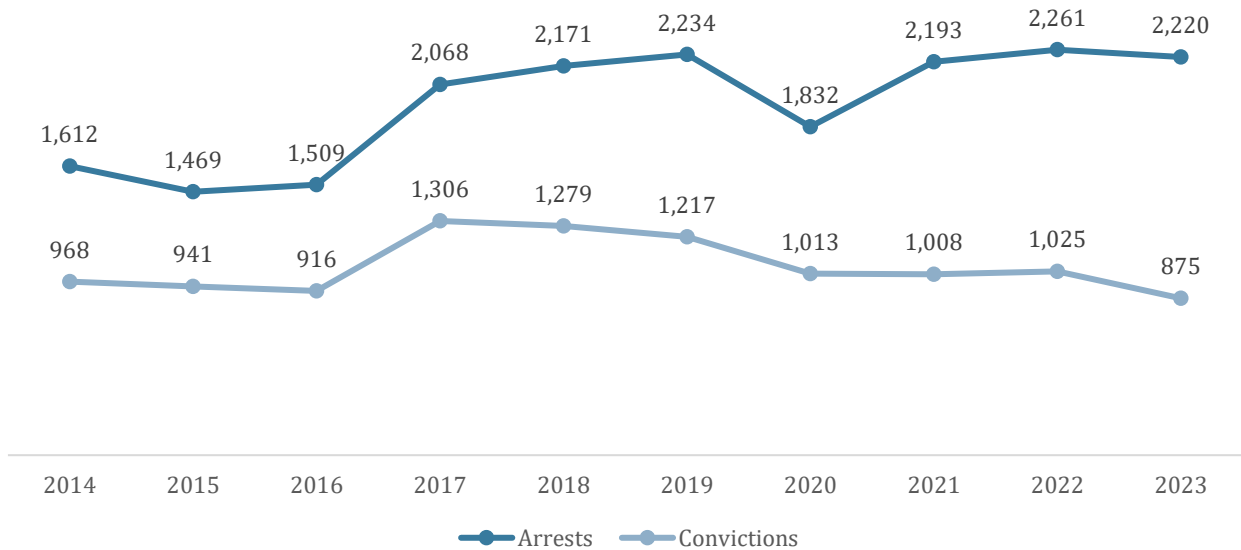
Sex offenders who are released from prison or are on probation must register with the sheriff in the county where they live within 48 hours of establishing a residence. Additionally, offenders must re-register in-person two or four times a year based on their conviction(s) and status. Law enforcement officers may arrest sex offenders for failure to register or re-register, and state attorneys may prosecute such offenses.

Arrests for registration violations have increased by 38% over the past 10 years—from 1,612 arrests in 2014 to 2,200 in 2023—but there has not been a commensurate increase in the number of convictions from these arrests. (See Exhibit 13.) When taken together, the conviction rate for 2014 arrests was 60%, whereas the conviction rate for arrests in 2022 was 45%.²⁸ The decline in conviction rate is reflective of the overall decline in prosecution rates for registration violation offenses.

²⁸ Arrests from 2023 were excluded from this analysis because many of these cases remain open.

Exhibit 13

Over the Past 10 Years, Arrests for Registration Violations Have Increased, but There Has Not Been a Corresponding Increase in Convictions

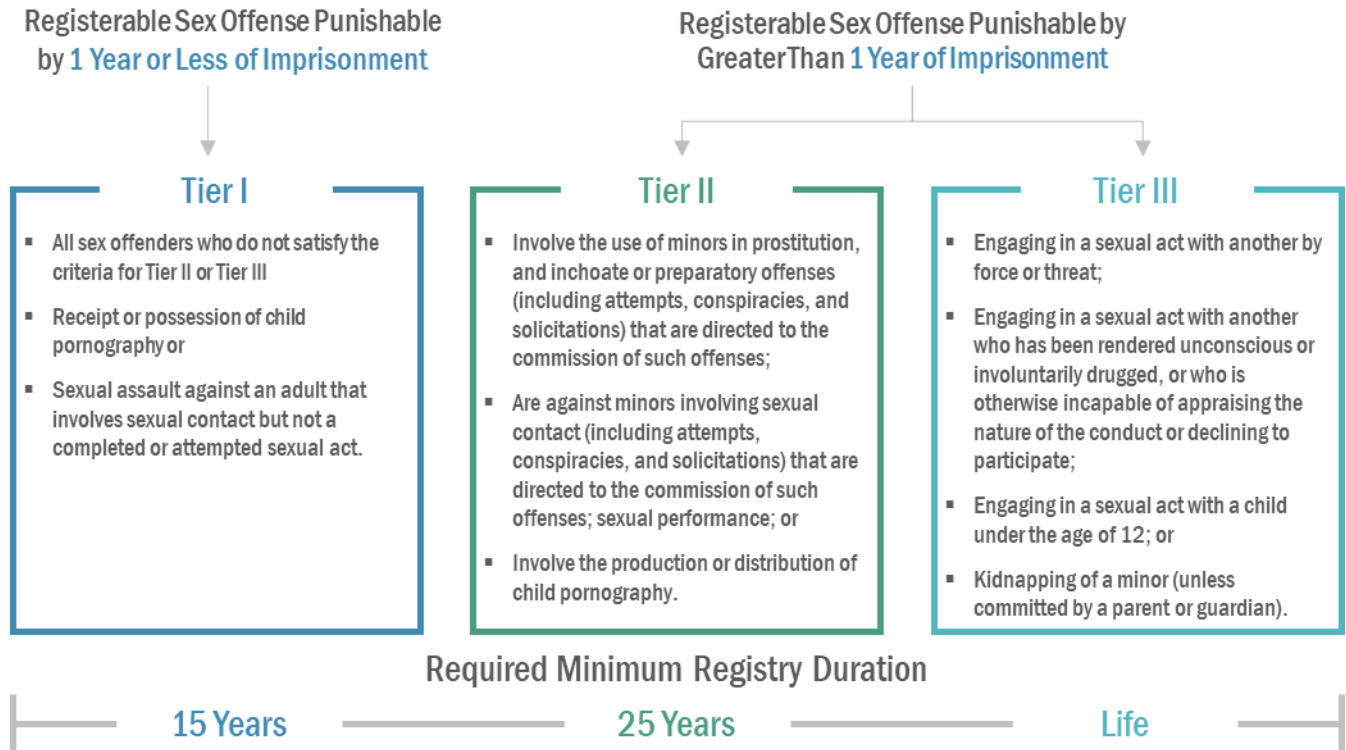


Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement arrest and conviction data, 2014 to 2023.

Sex offenders may be removed from Florida’s sex offender registry under certain circumstances

Federal law establishes a baseline for sex offender registries by creating a set of minimum national standards, including minimum time on the registry; however, sex offender registry state statutes and removal protocols vary. The Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act created three tiers of sex offenders based on crime severity. (See Exhibit 14.) The tier system establishes minimum required durations for sex offender registration following incarceration. Tier I has a minimum registration period of 15 years, Tier II requires 25 years, and Tier III requires lifetime registration. Length of incarceration also varies by tier level. Tier I offenses are punishable by less than one year of imprisonment. Tier II and III offenses are punishable by more than one year of imprisonment.

Exhibit 14
Federal Law Defines Three Tiers of Sex Offenders



Source: National Guidelines for Sex Offender Registration and Notification and 34 U.S.C. § 20901 et seq.ct.

State law also includes criteria for removal from the sex offender registry. Section 943.04354, *Florida Statutes*—commonly referred to as the Romeo and Juliet law—allows certain offenders to petition the court for relief from the requirement to register as a sexual offender.²⁹ Several criteria are specified, including that the victim in the case was at least 13 years old and younger than 18 years old, was no more than four years younger than the offender, and the sexual activity was consensual. Further, the qualifying offense must be the only sex crime on the offender's record requiring registration.

In addition, s. 943.0435(11), *Florida Statutes*, provides that certain individuals required to register as sexual offenders that have been lawfully released from sanctions, confinement, or supervision for at least 25 years and have not been arrested for any felony or misdemeanor offense since release may petition the court to remove registration requirements provided the offense was not based on an adult conviction for a violating offense. FDLE reported that juvenile sexual offenders were only qualified to register on or after July 1, 2007; therefore, the earliest a juvenile sexual offender could be eligible for removal from the registry is 2032.

A sexual offender who is required to register based on a requirement in another state who provides FDLE with proof that they are no longer required to register in any other state and that they do not meet the criteria for registration under any other portion of s. 943.0435(1)(h)1, *Florida Statutes* may be removed from the registry following FDLE confirmation. Other removal pathways include a full pardon or post-conviction relief for the qualifying offense and death. There is no provision in Florida law allowing sexual predators to petition the court for removal of the sexual predator designation.

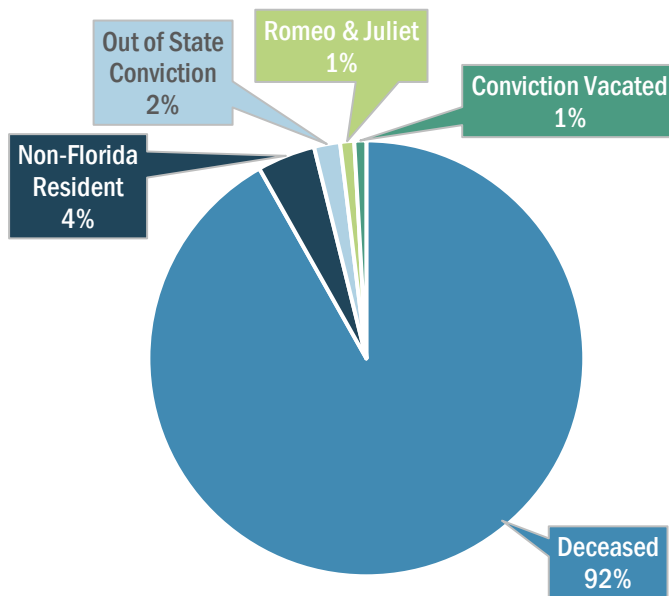
²⁹ While s. 943.04354, *F.S.*, mentions relief for sexual offenders and predators, FDLE reported that offenses that qualify an individual for registration as a predator generally disqualify them from relief under this statute.

Since 2021, approximately 2,500 individuals have been removed from Florida’s sex offender registry; most individuals removed were deceased

From October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2024, FDLE reported removing 2,554 individuals from Florida’s sex offender registry. Of those offenders removed, 2,282 were deceased; 107 did not reside in Florida and were removed from the state’s registry by establishing that they were no longer required to register in any other state and no longer met Florida’s registration criteria; 48 had out-of-state convictions and did reside in Florida; 26 were removed under Florida’s Romeo and Juliet law; and 22 were removed after their qualifying conviction(s) were vacated. (See Exhibit 15.)

Exhibit 15

Most Individuals Removed From Florida’s Sex Offender Registry Were Deceased



Source: FDLE data on individuals removed from the sex offender registry from October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2024.

AGENCY RESPONSE

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(2), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of OPPAGA’s report was submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for review and response. The department did not submit an official response.

APPENDIX A

Several Counties Experienced a Decline in the Number of Sex Offenders in the Community

Exhibit A-1 presents the number of registered sex offenders in Florida communities by county in 2021 and 2024 and the percentage and number change over time. The counties with the greatest decline in the number of registered sex offenders living in the community were Pinellas (-115) and Miami-Dade (-69). The counties with the greatest increase in registered sex offenders living in the community were Orange (158), Leon (90), and Alachua (89).

Exhibit A-1

Number of Registered Sex Offenders in the Community by County in 2021 and 2024 and the Percentage and Number Change Over the Past Three Years

County	Number of Sex Offenders in 2021	Number of Sex Offenders in 2024	Percentage Change	Number Change
Alachua	504	593	18%	89
Baker	72	99	38%	27
Bay	373	399	7%	26
Bradford	102	122	20%	20
Brevard	845	908	7%	63
Broward	1,240	1,249	1%	9
Calhoun	43	52	21%	9
Charlotte	272	279	3%	7
Citrus	333	367	10%	34
Clay	382	346	-9%	-36
Collier	269	252	-6%	-17
Columbia	309	320	4%	11
DeSoto	93	87	-6%	-6
Dixie	103	112	9%	9
Duval	2,233	2,247	1%	14
Escambia	980	1,006	3%	26
Flagler	128	137	7%	9
Franklin	37	33	-11%	-4
Gadsden	246	261	6%	15
Gilchrist	46	41	-11%	-5
Glades	36	43	19%	7
Gulf	35	36	3%	1
Hamilton	31	35	13%	4
Hardee	51	48	-6%	-3
Hendry	28	27	-4%	-1
Hernando	464	467	1%	3
Highlands	154	135	-12%	-19
Hillsborough	1,969	1,999	2%	30
Holmes	78	66	-15%	-12
Indian River	225	213	-5%	-12
Jackson	152	144	-5%	-8

County	Number of Sex Offenders in 2021	Number of Sex Offenders in 2024	Percentage Change	Number Change
Jefferson	54	60	11%	6
Lafayette	12	13	8%	1
Lake	506	525	4%	19
Lee	924	959	4%	35
Leon	687	777	13%	90
Levy	180	191	6%	11
Liberty	22	26	18%	4
Madison	62	57	-8%	-5
Manatee	486	494	2%	8
Marion	970	974	0%	4
Martin	151	136	-10%	-15
Miami-Dade	1,711	1,642	-4%	-69
Monroe	111	111	0%	0
Nassau	135	142	5%	7
Okaloosa	343	359	5%	16
Okeechobee	117	128	9%	11
Orange	2,558	2,716	6%	158
Osceola	523	589	13%	66
Palm Beach	1,050	1,117	6%	67
Pasco	888	872	-2%	-16
Pinellas	1,694	1,579	-7%	-115
Polk	1,190	1,239	4%	49
Putnam	337	371	10%	34
St Johns	236	239	1%	3
St Lucie	459	496	8%	37
Santa Rosa	360	370	3%	10
Sarasota	471	461	-2%	-10
Seminole	327	315	-4%	-12
Sumter	183	205	12%	22
Suwannee	79	84	6%	5
Taylor	68	82	21%	14
Union	44	38	-14%	-6
Volusia	973	935	-4%	-38
Wakulla	91	89	-2%	-2
Walton	160	187	17%	27
Washington	84	87	4%	3

Note: Changes in population are based on registered sex offenders with a permanent or a transient address (if they do not have a permanent address) within a county. Registered sex offenders in confinement were not included in this analysis.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data from September 2021 and October 2024.

APPENDIX B

Counties Varied in Terms of the Number and Percentage of Transient Sex Offenders

Exhibit B-1 presents the number of registered sex offenders in Florida communities by county. Orange, Duval, Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, and Pinellas counties had the highest number of sex offenders, respectively. Lafayette, Liberty, Hendry, Franklin, Hamilton, and Gulf counties had the lowest number of sex offenders, respectively. The exhibit also presents the percentage of registered sex offenders that report only a transient address (not a permanent address). Broward and Miami-Dade counties had the highest number and highest percentage of registered sex offenders with only a transient address. Eighteen counties had no registered sex offenders with only a transient address.

Exhibit B-1

Number and Percentage of Registered Sex Offenders in the Community by County and the Number and Percentage With Only a Transient Address

County	Number of Transient Sex Offenders	Total Number Sex Offenders	Percentage With Transient Address Only
Alachua	70	593	12%
Baker	0	99	0%
Bay	0	399	0%
Bradford	1	122	1%
Brevard	50	908	6%
Broward	426	1,249	34%
Calhoun	0	52	0%
Charlotte	10	279	4%
Citrus	5	367	1%
Clay	2	346	1%
Collier	12	252	5%
Columbia	1	320	<1%
DeSoto	1	87	1%
Dixie	1	112	1%
Duval	176	2,247	8%
Escambia	16	1,006	2%
Flagler	8	137	6%
Franklin	1	33	3%
Gadsden	3	261	1%
Gilchrist	0	41	0%
Glades	0	43	0%
Gulf	0	36	0%
Hamilton	0	35	0%
Hardee	0	48	0%
Hendry	2	27	7%
Hernando	11	467	2%
Highlands	0	135	0%
Hillsborough	140	1,999	7%
Holmes	0	66	0%

County	Number of Transient Sex Offenders	Total Number Sex Offenders	Percentage With Transient Address Only
Indian River	17	213	8%
Jackson	1	144	1%
Jefferson	0	60	0%
Lafayette	0	13	0%
Lake	16	525	3%
Lee	35	959	4%
Leon	43	777	6%
Levy	4	191	2%
Liberty	0	26	0%
Madison	4	57	7%
Manatee	22	494	4%
Marion	0	974	0%
Martin	2	136	1%
Miami-Dade	514	1,642	31%
Monroe	9	111	8%
Nassau	2	142	1%
Okaloosa	15	359	4%
Okeechobee	2	128	2%
Orange	194	2,716	7%
Osceola	34	589	6%
Palm Beach	170	1,117	15%
Pasco	19	872	2%
Pinellas	146	1,579	9%
Polk	30	1,239	2%
Putnam	7	371	2%
St. Johns	7	239	3%
St. Lucie	16	496	3%
Santa Rosa	6	370	2%
Sarasota	29	461	6%
Seminole	0	315	0%
Sumter	2	205	1%
Suwannee	2	84	2%
Taylor	0	82	0%
Union	0	38	0%
Volusia	61	935	7%
Wakulla	0	89	0%
Walton	3	187	2%
Washington	1	87	1%
Unknown county	2	119	2%
Total Offenders	2,351	30,907	4%

Note: A registered sex offender was counted as transient if they had a transient address on the registry and did not have a permanent address.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of Florida Department of Law Enforcement sex offender registry data from October 2024.



OPPAGA

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