

My name is Wayne Koepplin and I am a member of Welcome Back, a Missoula Group which helps returning citizens reintegrate with the community. I was sent to prison for 12 years on charges which included a violent offense.

When I got out, I had minimum wage jobs until I got the good job I now have, and there were times it got so bad, I banged my head against the wall. If something happened in the shop, people would throw my name at it because of my public history. Even if I work as hard as I can, to my boss, I'm still that substandard employee that he can throw rocks at. Even today, it happened again, and I said, oh yeah, it's my fault, isn't it? But, that's how easy it is for him to say, we are done -- Without any just cause for dismissal. And that's a habit, it's just an understanding. I can't play on the same field with anybody else.

I didn't even know that I could actually get off of the VO registry. You know, this kind of stirs up raw emotions. My parole officer never said beans about it. Nothing. And that's when I found out ten years after parole that you could petition the court to be deleted from the registry. And I thought, yeah right. And I was still on it. So, the total of amount of time it took me to get off the registry from my original arrest, prison time, parole plus 10 more years after parole was 39 years.

There are family ramifications! My sister works for a federal judge in another state. We love each other, me and my sister are tight. But we do not have any association. She cannot mention my name anywhere--he can't, and she won't. And I agree ... this is bad enough. And this was 16 years after release from incarceration.

This violent offender label impacts our family. It gets into the depths of our lives. My kids, my brother. They bring it up to my brother because we have the same last name, and all they have to do is type in his name and mine comes up. The people that he associates with will bring it up to him, they will acknowledge that they know about me. He just moved to a small town, and his friends all know it already. This violent offender thing is so pervasive.

Once returning citizens have served their time and a reasonable length of parole (shorter than the 10 years I had offense-free), then they should not have to remain on the registry. Also, the law should be changed so that parolees for violent offenses must be fully informed of the rights and procedures for getting their names removed from the registry after parole is completed. In my case I just recently had my name removed from the registry and I will be eligible for full age 65 retirement. I had the shadow of the violent offender label over virtually all of my productive working years after prison.

Wayne K., March 23, 2020