Sex Offender Civil Commitment: The Treatment Paradox

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Twenty-one states and the federal government have civil commitment schemes that provide for the further confinement of sex offenders after they have completed their prison sentences. These schemes survive constitutional scrutiny on the grounds that they are not a second prison sentence, but rather serve the non-criminal ends of protecting society and helping treat violent sex offenders. The underlying legislation confirms the treatment objective by elaborating statutory guidelines for treatment programs.

This Comment argues that treatment—although guaranteed by statute, legislative findings, case law, and the constitution—is an empty promise. Indeed, participation in treatment harms the very offender that it purports to help. This treatment paradox arises because successful treatment and relapse prevention require that an offender discuss his sexual fantasies and past transgressions; yet, unprotected by privilege or confidentiality, these cathartic admissions are utilized in civil commitment proceedings to secure further confinement. Because the prosecution heavily relies on treatment records to show that the offender continues to suffer from a mental abnormality and because the completion of treatment does not favorably impact an offender’s chance of release, offenders often elect to forgo treatment. This treatment disincentive effectively denies offenders the opportunity to heal and to obtain release from commitment through treatment, an opportunity envisioned by statute and by the civil commitment scheme’s constitutional underpinnings.

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This Comment traces the history of sex offender civil commitment and investigates the treatment paradox through the lens of law and psychiatry. To conclude, I suggest statutory remedies that could transform the promise of treatment into a reality.

Introduction

Violence, including sexual violence, is usually controlled through criminal prosecution, conviction, and punishment. However, in recent years, states have increasingly turned to a civil system of confinement for the most dangerous sex offenders. Laws prescribing civil commitment for sexually violent predators identify those persons convicted of sexual offenses who are the most likely to recidivate and provide a mechanism whereby, upon completion of their criminal sentences, they can be isolated until they are no longer a threat to society. Despite the extreme deprivation of liberty that accompanies forced confinement, the Supreme Court has deemed

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1. See, e.g., Addington v. Texas, 441 U. S. 418, 425 (1979) ("This Court repeatedly has recognized that civil commitment for any purpose constitutes a significant deprivation of liberty"
these commitment statutes civil, and not punitive or criminal, in nature. Because of this designation, sex offender commitment processes need not afford the procedural safeguards guaranteed in criminal proceedings, including the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, the Sixth Amendment rights to jury trial and to assistance of counsel, and the requirement of proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Civil commitment programs represent a delicate balance between society’s interest in protecting the public, on one hand, and the confined individual’s interest in liberty, on the other. This Comment focuses on one aspect of that balance: treatment. I argue that persons in state commitment facilities have a statutory and constitutional right to treatment. Because civil commitment schemes circumvent the strict procedural constraints of the criminal justice system, treatment is one of the few guarantees afforded to involuntarily committed sex offenders. However, a sex offender’s full and candid participation in treatment is limited by the reality that all treatment records are discoverable. Unhindered by the right against self-incrimination and the psychotherapist-patient privilege, the government can introduce treatment records at the initial commitment trial and at all subsequent release hearings. Moreover, experts disproportionately rely on treatment records in their determination of mental abnormality and future dangerousness—the two central criteria for commitment.

This commitment scheme confronts sex offenders with a Catch-22: without participating in treatment, offenders cannot demonstrate that they have learned from past transgressions and are fit for release; yet by participating in treatment—which requires admission of guilt, polygraph testing, sexual history documentation, dream logs, and victim letters—the offenders incriminate themselves. This Catch-22 has larger, systemic implications. At the point that treatment is “mere pretext,” serving more to propagate evidence for the prosecution than to provide a legitimate opportunity for rehabilitation, civil
commitment becomes constitutionally problematic. Treatment-less commitment rings deceptively punitive, rendering the system subject to ex post facto and double jeopardy challenges.

This Comment discusses the implications of discoverable treatment records by juxtaposing the statutory and constitutional promise of treatment with the reality of the commitment process. Part I provides a background to civil commitment statutes, including relevant history and general criticism. Part II examines the “promise of treatment,” concluding that state statutes and the federal constitution guarantee care and treatment for involuntarily committed persons. Part III discusses the “reality of treatment,” examining how the prosecution’s reliance on treatment records discourages offenders from meaningful participation in treatment and discussing the critique that sexually violent predators are not treatable. In Part IV, I search for a solution that will allow experts and fact-finders to make informed decisions as to the dangerousness of sex offenders and yet will incentivize offenders’ treatment, rehabilitation, and eventual transition back to society. I conclude that courts are extremely deferential to the legislature’s stated objectives and, hence, few constitutional or state-prescribed remedies exist by which individuals can challenge their classification as sexually violent predators or their treatment options. Hence, it is up to state legislatures to craft sound policies that provide real treatment options and incentivize participation in treatment.

I. CIVIL COMMITMENT STATUTES: HISTORY AND CRITICISM

There is a long history of sex offender civil commitment in the United States. As early as 1911, state legislation defined violent sex offenders as “defective delinquents” and “criminal psychopaths.” Laws for the special commitment of sex offenders first appeared in the 1930s, paralleling the development of medical explanations for criminal behavior and the desire to emphasize “treatment goals over punishment.” By 1960, twenty-six states and the District of Columbia had special statutes authorizing civil commitment for persons who courts determined to be “sexual psychopaths.” Unlike modern

9. See, e.g., Kansas v. Hendricks, 521 U.S. 346, 371 (1997) (Kennedy, J., concurring) (“If the object or purpose of the Kansas [sex offender civil commitment] law had been to provide treatment but the treatment provisions were adopted as a sham or mere pretext, there would have been an indication of the forbidden purpose to punish.”).
10. See, e.g., id.
13. Raquel Blacher, Comment, Historical Perspective of the “Sex Psychopath” Statute: From the Revolutionary Era to the Present Federal Crime Bill, 46 Mercer L. Rev. 889, 903
sexually violent predator commitment programs that take effect after the completion of a sex offender’s criminal sentence, psychopath commitments served as an alternative to criminal sentencing. In the 1970s, sexual psychopath laws fell out of favor due to empirical evidence that violent sex offenders were not responding to treatment, a shift toward determinative sentencing, and court decisions that held that certain features of the laws infringed offenders’ civil liberties. For example, one circuit court concluded that because indefinite commitment under the sexual psychopath laws was “justifiable only upon a theory of therapeutic treatment,” the lack of adequate treatment destroyed any valid basis for distinguishing sexual psychopath committees from other prisoners in order to subject them to indeterminate commitment.

In 1990, Washington became the first state to enact a new form of civil commitment law in what Eric Janus classifies as the “second wave” of sex offender commitment schemes. Inspired by high-profile crimes and public outrage, these second-generation laws operated as an extension to already

(1995); see also Karl M. Bowman, Review of Sex Legislation and the Control of Sex Offenders in the United States of America, INT'L REV. OF CRIMINAL POL'Y, July 1953, at 20–39 (1953) (explaining that various terms were used to describe the targeted group of sex offenders, including “psychopathic offenders” and, most typically, “sexual psychopaths”).


15. See Blacher, supra note 13, at 906 (stating that various factors led to the treatment’s decline, including “the recognition that not all violent sexual offenders were likely to respond to the same type of therapy; the growing awareness that sex offenders were not mentally ill,” and “the lack of proven treatment methods to reduce recidivism rates”). A number of influential reports, including those of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry and the American Bar Association’s Criminal Justice Mental Health Standards, recommended the repeal of special statutes for mentally disordered offenders. See GROUP FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PSYCHIATRY, PSYCHIATRY AND SEX PSYCHOPATH LEGISLATION: THE ‘30S TO THE ‘80S 942, 935 (1977) (characterizing sex psychopath statutes as an “experiment [that] has failed” because they provided neither effective treatment nor the incarceration of truly dangerous individuals and recommending the repeal of sex psychopath legislation).


17. Case law converted sexual psychopath laws into something inherently criminal. See, e.g., Specht v. Patterson, 386 U.S. 605, 609–11 (1967) (holding that due process in commitment hearings requires assistance of counsel, the right to confront and to cross-examine adverse witnesses, the right to present one’s own witnesses and evidence, and a final decision sufficiently articulated to permit meaningful review on appeal); United States ex rel. Stachulak v. Coughlin, 520 F.2d 931, 935 (7th Cir. 1975) (finding that individuals committed under the Illinois Sexually Dangerous Persons Act suffer a “grievous loss” and that, in addition to statutory rights to a hearing, jury trial, and counsel, a defendant is entitled to the right to confront and to cross-examine witnesses, the right against self-incrimination, the right to speedy trial, and a reasonable-doubt standard of proof) (citations omitted).


20. For example, Washington’s civil commitment law responded to public outcry over the
lengthened prison sentences and allowed states to keep offenders who had served their full prison sentences in protective custody for as long as they were deemed dangerous. Today, twenty states and the federal government have involuntary commitment statutes aimed at “sexually violent predators.”

Although state-to-state variation exists in the exact language of these laws, most states define a “sexually violent predator” as a person (1) who has been convicted of or charged with a sexually violent offense and (2) who suffers from a mental abnormality or personality disorder (3) that makes the person likely to engage in acts of sexual violence. As of 2006, more than 4,500 individuals were confined nationwide pursuant to sexually violent predator laws.

rape, mutilation, and killing of a seven-year-old boy by a mentally retarded man who had professed the intent to molest children if released from prison, and the kidnapping and murder of a young woman by an inmate who the state mental hospital considered “too dangerous to handle.”

Roxanne Lieb, Washington’s Sexually Violent Predator Law: Legislative History and Comparisons with Other States 1 (1996), http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/WaSexlaw.pdf. New Jersey enacted its civil commitment legislation following community outrage over the release of Donald Chapman, who had served twelve years for the abduction and rape of a twenty-three-year-old female and had expressed the intent to continue committing sexually motivated offenses against women and children upon release. Claudine M. Leone, New Jersey Assembly Bill 155—A Bill Allowing the Civil Commitment of Violent Sex Offenders After the Completion of a Criminal Sentence, 18 SETON HALL LEGIS. J. 890, 890–96 (1994).


22. 18 U.S.C. § 4248 (2006). The Supreme Court recently upheld this federal civil commitment statute—which authorizes the Department of Justice to detain a mentally ill, sexually dangerous federal prisoner beyond the date the prisoner would otherwise be released—as a constitutional exercise of congressional power under the Necessary and Proper Clause. United States v. Comstock, 130 S. Ct. 1949 (2010). The Comstock opinion expressly declined to address whether § 4248 or its application denied equal protection, procedural or substantive due process, or any other constitutional rights. Id. at 1956, 1965.

23. While “Sexually Violent Predator” or “SVP” is the most common designation for civilly committed offenders, Massachusetts and Wisconsin use “Sexually Dangerous Person,” North Dakota uses “Sexually Dangerous Individual,” and Arizona and Illinois use “Sexually Violent Person;” Minnesota has two designations under their law—“Sexually Dangerous Person” and “Sexual Psychopathic Personality.” Adam H. Deming, Sex Offender Civil Commitment Program Demographics and Characteristics (2006), available at http://www.soccpn.org/docs/soccpndemochar.pdf.


Critics of modern sex offender civil commitment schemes are wide-ranging and include constitutional challenges; arguments that such schemes have excessive cost; concerns that the statutory criteria for sexually violent predator determinations set too low a threshold; and fairness concerns that the commitment process is driven by political decisionmaking and uses actuarial

26. Critics argue that civil commitment programs inappropriately blur the line between punishment and civil commitment in violation of the constitutional prohibitions against double jeopardy and ex post facto punishments. See, e.g., Peter C. Pfaffrenoth, The Need for Coherence: State’s Civil Commitment of Sex Offenders in the Wake of Kansas v. Crane, 55 STAN. L. REV. 2229, 2259–62 (2003). For a discussion of constitutional concerns in the context of civil commitment, see infra Part II.B.

27. See Monica Davey & Abby Goodnough, Doubts Rise as States Hold Sex Offenders After Prison, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 4, 2007, at A1 (stating that civil commitment programs, on average, cost taxpayers four times more than keeping the offenders in prison). Costs include treatment, security and supervision, direct care, health care, contracted services, legal services, psychological examinations, transportation, and administrative overhead. In 2006, more than $454.7 million was budgeted nationwide for civil commitment programs, and the average yearly cost across states was $94,017 per resident in a commitment center as opposed to $25,994 per Department of Corrections (DOC) inmate. WSIPP, supra note 25, at 5. California’s cost of civil commitment was the highest: $166,000 per sexually violent predator resident per year. Id. at 5. State commitment centers are also costly to build. For example, California’s Coalinga State Hospital, constructed in 2005 to house California’s sexually violent predator population, cost approximately $388 million. Press Release, Cal. Dep’t of Mental Health, Coalinga State Hospital Facts (2005), available at http://www.dmh.ca.gov/News/Press_Releases/docs/2005/ dedication/ CSH%20Facts.pdf. Further, critics opine that civil commitment programs divert resources that would otherwise fund prevention programs and probation departments to the highly visible but extremely rare incidents of sexual violence. See, e.g., JANUS, supra note 19, at 2–4.

28. For example, the past sexually violent offense requirement encompasses persons charged with just one crime of sexual violence; persons charged with sexual offenses as juveniles; and, in some states, persons charged with sexual conduct that does not involve any physical contact with another person, such as “living off or sharing earnings of a minor prostitute,” MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 123A, § 1; possession of child pornography, id.; stalking via mail or telephone, MINN. STAT. § 253B.02(7)(b); or attempted offenses, N.H. REV. STAT. § 135-E:2(X1)(f); S.C. CODE ANN. § 44-48-30(2)(i); WIS. STAT. § 980.01(6)(c). South Carolina includes as a sexually violent offense the acts of incest or “buggery” (anal penetration), even when with a consenting adult. S.C. CODE ANN. § 44-48-30(2)(i)–(j). The mental abnormality requirement includes antisocial personality disorder, which “is extremely common in prisons with prevalence rates as high as 40–60% among the male sentenced population.” P. Moran, The Epidemiology of Antisocial Personality Disorder, 34 SOC. PSYCHIATRY & PSYCHIATRIC EPIDEMIOLOGY 231, 234 (1999); see also Rudolph Alexander, Jr., Civil Commitment of Sex Offenders to Mental Institutions: Should the Standard Be Based on Serious Mental Illness or Mental Disorder?, 11 J. HEALTH & SOC. POL’y 67 (2000) (arguing that civil commitment should not include personality disorders, which many sex offenders suffer from, in the same category as major mental illness). And the risk of future dangerous determination is based on actuarial comparisons to other sexually violent predators; these actuarial tools are only 71 percent accurate, undercalculate the decrease in risk with advancing age, and do not take into account the link between an individual’s mental illness and the risk of recidivism as constitutionally required. Tamara Rice Lave, Controlling the Offender: Sex, Mental Illness, and the Static 99 (November 2006) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

methods that “accentuate the prejudices and biases that are built into the penal code and into criminal law enforcement.”

Despite such strong criticisms, the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld sex offender civil commitment statutes as constitutional. The Supreme Court addressed the constitutionality of modern civil commitment statutes in the 1997 case Kansas v. Hendricks. The case addressed the civil commitment of Leroy Hendricks, who had a forty-year string of convictions and prison sentences for molesting at least twelve children, including his own stepdaughter and stepson. By a 5 to 4 margin, the Supreme Court upheld the Kansas Sexually Violent Predator Act against substantive due process, double jeopardy, and ex post facto challenges.

Although Hendricks was a close decision, many states responded by enacting their own sexually violent predator legislation. These commitment statutes, and the underlying constitutional jurisprudence set forth in Hendricks, provide the framework for the promise of treatment, discussed in Part II.

II. THE PROMISE OF TREATMENT

This Comment argues that treatment is a critical component of sexually violent predator statutes for two reasons: treatment is a statutory requirement, enforceable through state causes of action; and treatment is a constitutional requirement, subject to due process, ex post facto, and double jeopardy challenges.

A. Treatment as a Statutory Requirement

All states with civil commitment programs provide treatment for persons confined as sexually violent predators. This provision of treatment validates

Going Nowhere, STAR TRIB., June 11, 2008, at A1 (noting that Minnesota has a political appointee making release decisions, that the sexually violent predator population has grown exponentially, and that “[b]ecause no one can guarantee an offender won’t rape or molest again, the safest course . . . has been to keep offenders locked up regardless of how their treatment has progressed”).


Id. at 354–55. Hendricks conceded that he “can’t control the urge” to molest children when he “get[s] stressed out” and that the only sure way he could keep from sexually abusing children in the future was “to die.” Id.

Id. at 371. For an extended discussion of the Hendricks decision, see infra Part II.B.

To avoid additional constitutional challenge, state commitment programs typically mimic the Washington/Kansas model that was upheld as constitutional in Hendricks. Grant H. Morris, The Evil That Men Do: Perverting Justice to Punish Perverts, 2000 U. ILL. L. REV. 1199, 1204 (2000).

the parens patriae and general police power under which states enact civil
commitment legislation and provides the necessary benchmark by which states
can determine whether an individual is fit for release.

State statutes universally emphasize treatment for offenders and protection
of society as joint aims of civil commitment. These dual aims reflect the two
powers—parens patriae and general police power—under which states
implement their civil commitment programs. Under the parens patriae power,
states protect and provide services for individuals, such as mentally ill
offenders who are unable to take care of themselves. Under the police power,
states can civilly commit dangerous persons to protect the public.

According to state legislative findings, sexually violent predators have
behavioral abnormalities that render them unamenable to “traditional mental
illness treatment modalities.” Thus, unlike mentally ill persons serviced by
existing involuntary commitment procedures, violent sex offenders require a
separate commitment process to address their long-term treatment needs as well
as the elevated threat they pose to society. Because “the prognosis for
rehabilitating sexually violent predators in a prison setting is poor,” states
intend an independent system of confinement with unique treatment modalities.

Most state statutes detail treatment either as a “right” belonging to the
committed offender or as a duty of the state. Many states couch their
commitment programs in terms of treatment. For example, the Massachusetts
“Care, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Sexually Dangerous Persons” provision
commits sexually dangerous persons to a “treatment center.” Minnesota’s
“Commitment and Treatment Act” includes notification of “the right to obtain

36. E.g., N.Y. MENTAL HYG. LAW § 10.01; see also In re Detention of Darling, 712
N.W.2d 98, 100 (Iowa 2006) (noting that one goal of the Iowa civil commitment statute is
treatment of the sexually violent predator).
37. See, e.g., United States v. Comstock, 551 F.3d 274, 278 (4th Cir. 2009), overruled by
130 S. Ct. 1949 (2010) (challenging the federal civil commitment scheme on the grounds that the
government, unlike states, has no general police or parens patriae power).
39. Id.
40. TEX. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE ANN. § 841.001; see also IOWA CODE § 229A.1; FLA.
STAT. § 394.910; KAN. STAT. ANN. § 59-29a01; N.H. REV. STAT. § 135-E:1; N.Y. MENTAL HYG.
LAW § 10.01; S.C. CODE ANN. § 394.910; WASH. REV. CODE § 71.09.010.
41. Every state has a statute for the civil commitment of individuals with mental illness.
These laws usually provide short-term treatment for individuals suffering from severe psychiatric
illness where the persons’ symptoms put them at imminent risk of serious physical harm.
42. E.g., FLA. STAT. § 394.910; S.C. CODE ANN. § 44-48-20.
43. FLA. STAT. § 394.910; N.H. REV. STAT. § 135-E:1.
44. See MINN. STAT. § 253B.03(7); WASH. REV. CODE § 71.09.080(2).
45. See 42 PA. CONS. STAT. ANN. § 6406(e) (2010) (listing treatment as a “duty” and
requiring that the Department of Public Welfare “develop policies and procedures for providing
individualized treatment and discharge plans based on clinical guidelines and professional
standards in the fields of sexual offender treatment and mental health”); see also CAL. WELF. &
INST. CODE § 6606(a); N.Y. MENTAL HYG. LAW § 10.01(f).
46. MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 123A.
treatment and services voluntarily."  

47. Statutes either require treatment or provide voluntary treatment. Finally, treatment programs vary in structure, with some states providing no statutory guidelines for the treatment program, and other states expressly requiring individualized treatment plans or periodic progress reports from qualified treatment providers.

Treatment is also central to a state’s statutory scheme in that it signals a potential end to commitment. Each state provides annual or biennial reviews for committed persons. These reviews are essential to the constitutionality of the commitment process because states cannot, consistent with due process, civilly detain persons “absent a determination in civil commitment proceedings of current mental illness and dangerousness.” As such, most statutes allow committed persons to petition the court for conditional release if their mental condition or personality disorder has changed such that they are no longer likely to engage in predatory acts of sexual violence. However, while successful treatment can provide the impetus for release, states impose no obligation to achieve treatment success for unwilling or untreatable offenders.

47. Minn. Stat. § 253B.03(10)(2).
49. See Minn. Stat. § 253B.04 (stating that voluntary admission is preferred over involuntary commitment and treatment); Neb. Rev. Stat. § 71-1202 (providing that it is the “public policy” of the state that dangerous sex offenders obtain voluntary treatment, but that if “voluntary treatment is not obtained, such persons shall be subject to involuntary custody and treatment”).
50. See, e.g., S.C. Code Ann. § 44-48-170 (stating only that the treatment program must comply with constitutional requirements).
51. See, e.g., Neb. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 36-3701(F) (requiring monthly reports for offenders on conditional release to a less restrictive alternative); Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 123A, § 16 (requiring annual reports describing the treatments offered); Neb. Rev. Stat. § 71-1215–16 (requiring reports regarding the individual’s progress in treatment every ninety days for the first year and every six months thereafter); N.Y. Mental Hyg. Law § 10.11(b)(2) (requiring treatment reports every four months).
52. See, e.g., Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 36-3701(F) (requiring a current examination of the committed person’s mental condition once per year); Tex. Health & Safety Code Ann. § 841.102 (providing for biennial review); Wis. Stat. § 980.08(1) (allowing a review of confinement after twelve months).
53. Fouche v. Louisiana, 504 U.S. 71, 72 (1992); see id. at 79 (holding that, as a matter of due process, insanity acquittee is entitled to release when he has recovered his sanity or is no longer dangerous even if he continues to have an untreatable antisocial personality disorder); id. at 88 (O’Connor, J., concurring) (“I think it clear that acquittees could not be confined as mental patients absent some medical justification for doing so; in such a case the necessary connection between the nature and purposes of confinement would be absent.”).
55. See In re Detention of Darling, 712 N.W.2d 98, 101 (Iowa 2006) (“Chapter 229A does
States that fail to provide adequate treatment are subject to state-law causes of action. However, courts have hesitated to pronounce a robust right to treatment given a lack of statutory guidance. For example, the Supreme Court of Iowa held that the “statutory right to treatment” was satisfied as long as “an individualized treatment program would be offered to [the committed person] in an attempt to improve his ability to control his deviant behaviors.”

In sum, although not expressly pronounced as a statutory “right” in most jurisdictions, treatment is a required part of every civil commitment program. Successful treatment promises to sex offenders an opportunity for release from commitment. Moreover, the statutory requirement of treatment is closely tied to the schemes’ constitutionality: without the nonpunitive aim of treatment, commitment would constitute additional penal incarceration in violation of substantive due process and the double jeopardy and ex post facto clauses of the Constitution.

B. Treatment as a Constitutional Right

In addition to the statutory requirement of treatment, I argue that treatment is a constitutional right for involuntarily committed persons. Although the Supreme Court has never confirmed a constitutional right to treatment, the right for individuals to participate meaningfully in treatment is implicit in the involuntary (implicating substantive due process concerns) and purportedly civil (implicating ex post facto and double jeopardy concerns) nature of the civil commitment system. This Section addresses the interplay of treatment not require that the treatment will ultimately be successful as a prerequisite for commitment.”); see also CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE § 6606(b) (“Treatment does not mean that treatment be successful . . . nor does it mean that the person must recognize his or her problem and willingly participate.”).

57. Seling v. Young, 531 U.S. 250, 265 (2001) (explaining that where the commitment law gives committed persons the right to adequate care and individualized treatment, it is for the state courts to determine whether the commitment centers are operating in accordance with state law and to provide a remedy).

58. In re Detention of Betsworth, 711 N.W.2d 280, 289 (Iowa 2006).


and substantive due process, ex post facto, and double jeopardy challenges to the civil commitment process. Ascertaining the constitutional boundary of a treatment right is particularly important because certain state statutes defer to this constitutional floor.\(^{61}\)

As a matter of substantive due process, involuntary commitment severely curtails individual rights and, thus, is allowed only in "certain narrow circumstances."\(^{62}\) The Court has found that civil detentions meet the requirements of substantive due process as long as the nature and duration of commitment bears some relationship to the objectives of confinement.\(^{63}\) With regard to the statutory definition of a sexually violent predator, *Kansas v. Hendricks* held that civil commitment statutes satisfy substantive due process requirements where, as in the Kansas Sexually Violent Predator Act, they couple proof of dangerousness with the proof of some additional factor, such as a “mental illness” or “mental abnormality.”\(^{64}\) With regard to treatment once an offender is committed, the Supreme Court has held that because an institutionalized person is wholly dependent on the state, the state has a “duty to provide certain services and care.”\(^{65}\) Nonetheless, the Court grants the state “considerable discretion in determining the nature and scope of its responsibilities.”\(^{66}\)

In addition to substantive due process challenges, civil commitment schemes, which provide fewer procedural protections than mandated by the

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\(^{62}\)Kansas v. Hendricks, 521 U.S. 346, 357 (1997) (providing that, although freedom from restraint is at the core of the liberty interest protected by the Due Process Clause from arbitrary government action, in "certain narrow circumstances" states can civilly detain people who pose a danger to public health and safety because they are unable to control their behavior).

\(^{63}\)See, e.g., Foucha v. Louisiana, 504 U.S. 71, 80 (1992) (finding that continued civil confinement of an insanity acquittee became unconstitutional where the state could no longer show by clear and convincing evidence that the individual was both mentally ill and dangerous); Jackson v. Indiana, 406 U.S. 715, 738 (1972) (finding that the state was entitled to hold a person for being incompetent to stand trial only long enough to determine if he could be cured and become competent, otherwise the state was required to afford the protections constitutionally required in a civil commitment proceeding).

\(^{64}\)Hendricks, 521 U.S. at 358. In *Kansas v. Crane*, the Court clarified the *Hendricks* constitutional standard by requiring "proof of serious difficulty in controlling behavior" to commit a sexually violent predator civilly. 534 U.S. 407, 413 (2002).

\(^{65}\)Youngberg v. Romeo, 457 U.S. 307, 317 (1982) (holding that a severely mentally retarded person had a due process right to “training” minimally necessary to ensure his safety and freedom from shackling while institutionalized against his will); *see also* Polite v. Liberty Behavioral Health Care, Inc., No. 2:07-cv-158, 2009 WL 2242626, at *4 (M.D. Fla. July 27, 2009) (“Contrary to the defendant’s argument that civil detainees at the FCCC do not have a federally protected right to treatment, the Fourteenth Amendment most certainly requires a State provide ‘minimally adequate or reasonable training’ to those involuntarily committed, civil detainees.” (quoting *Youngberg*, 457 U.S. at 319)).

\(^{66}\)Youngberg, 457 U.S. at 317.
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criminal system, are subject to double jeopardy and ex post facto challenges alleging that they are not truly civil but rather a “camouflaged form of punishment.”

As a preliminary matter, criminal and civil laws serve different purposes and have different procedural requirements. Criminal laws are retroactive in nature: they aim to punish for past acts and serve the goals of retribution, incapacitation, and deterrence. Civil schemes are prospective in nature: they seek to prevent future harm and serve the civil goals of incapacitation and treatment. Due to the deprivation of liberty involved, the criminal system requires unique procedural protections—the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination and double jeopardy; the Sixth Amendment right to trial by jury, to confront witnesses, and to the assistance of counsel; and a heightened burden of proof compared to that in civil proceedings.

In determining the civil or criminal nature of commitment, the Supreme Court has given deference to a state legislature’s professed intent. For example, in Allen v. Illinois, the Court upheld an Illinois commitment as “essentially civil in nature” where the statute required the state to provide “care and treatment for persons adjudged sexually dangerous . . . in a facility set aside to provide psychiatric care” and the record did not demonstrate that individuals—who could apply for release and would be discharged if found to be no longer dangerous—had been “confined under conditions incompatible with the State’s asserted interest in treatment.”

In Kansas v. Hendricks, the Court similarly deferred to legislative intent in finding that the Kansas commitment statute did not violate the Constitution’s double jeopardy provision or ban on ex post facto lawmaking. The Court heavily relied on the Kansas legislature’s characterization of commitment as “civil” and its placement of the commitment statute within the probate code rather than the criminal code. The Hendricks Court found that, because

68. Ra, supra note 4, at 350.
70. See Allen, 478 U.S. at 371 (explaining that if a law does not try to prevent past misdeeds, it is not criminal in nature); see also Grossman, supra note 67, at 478.
71. U.S. CONST. amends. V, VI.
72. See Smith v. Doc, 538 U.S. 84, 92 (2003) (stating that since the Court normally defers to the legislature’s stated intent, only the “clearest proof” will suffice to override legislative intent and prove the law punitive in nature); Kansas v. Hendricks, 521 U.S. 346, 361 (1997); Allen, 478 U.S. at 368.
74. Id. at 373.
76. Id. at 360–61.
nothing on the face of the statute suggested that the Kansas legislature sought to create anything other than a civil commitment scheme, the respondent (Hendricks) had to provide “the clearest proof” that the scheme was “so punitive in purpose or effect as to negate the State’s intention to deem it civil.” The Court concluded that Hendricks failed to satisfy this heavy burden because neither the affirmative restraint nor the potentially infinite duration of commitment evinced a punitive purpose.78

As a part of its analysis, the Hendricks Court found that a failure to offer legitimate treatment did not render the civil commitment statute punitive where treatment for a condition was not possible or where treatment was merely an ancillary, rather than an overriding, state concern.79 The Court pointed out that Hendricks was the first person committed under the Kansas Act and that the state did not have all of its treatment procedures in place.80 In the opinion of many observers, this aspect of the Hendricks decision eroded sex offenders’ right to treatment by signaling that civil commitment laws are constitutional as long as they provide some degree of treatment, even if treatment is not provided in every case or is not the primary goal of the commitment.81

Justice Kennedy, as the swing vote, wrote a short concurrence emphasizing that treatment underlies the civil nature of involuntary confinement and that treatment must be more than “mere pretext”:

77. Id. at 361 (quoting United States v. Ward, 448 U.S. 242, 248–49 (1980)) (internal quotations omitted). As a threshold matter, the Court explained that the civil commitment statute did not implicate retribution or deterrence, the two primary objectives of criminal punishment. Id. at 361–62. The statute’s purpose was not retributive because it did not affix culpability for prior criminal conduct (rather, prosecutors introduced past criminal history to support a finding of mental abnormality or dangerousness); it did not make criminal conviction a prerequisite for commitment; and it lacked a scienter requirement, an important element in distinguishing between criminal and civil statutes. Id. at 362. Nor did the statute operate as a deterrent because the threat of confinement was unlikely to deter individuals who suffer from mental abnormalities that prevent them from controlling their behavior. Id. at 362–63.

78. According to the Court, affirmative restraint did not evince punitive intent because the affirmative restraint of mentally ill and dangerous persons had been historically regarded as a legitimate nonpunitive objective. Id. at 363. Moreover, the potentially infinite duration of confinement corresponded with the purpose of holding a person until his mental abnormality no longer caused him to be a threat to others and did not implicate any punitive objective. Id. at 363–64.

79. Id. at 365–66.

80. Id. at 367–68.

81. See Steven I. Friedland, On Treatment, Punishment, and the Civil Commitment of Sex Offenders, 70 U. COLO. L. REV. 73, 112 (1989) (“[T]he Court no longer had to examine the circumstances of a commitment to determine whether the law met the treatment minimum; it could now simply look at the face of the law.”); Erich H. Gaston, Kansas v. Hendricks: The Court’s Unworkable Constitutional Standards and Flawed Analysis Threaten Freedom, 2 QUINNIPIAE HEALTH L.J. 227, 251 (1999) (“A particular danger is that Hendricks implies that treatment has little if any bearing on whether a state’s decision to civilly commit a person comports with due process.”); Grossman, supra note 67, at 503 (“After the Hendricks decision, courts are now free to apply a much more lenient standard than that which was previously required to satisfy due process.”).
A law enacted after commission of the offense and which punishes the offense by extending the term of confinement is a textbook example of an _ex post facto_ law. If the object or purpose of the Kansas law had been to provide treatment but the treatment provisions were adopted as a sham or mere pretext, there would have been an indication of the forbidden purpose to punish.\(^{82}\)

The _Hendricks_ dissent went further, suggesting that a civil scheme that requires treatment yet systematically denies access to treatment violates both substantive due process and the Constitution’s _ex post facto_ clause.\(^{83}\) According to Justice Breyer, if Kansas’s law were truly civil, the legislature would be seeking to help individuals overcome their mental abnormalities, at least insofar as treatment for the abnormality existed and was potentially helpful.\(^{84}\)

Thus, the provision of treatment is essential to the constitutionality of the civil commitment scheme. Yet, despite the importance of treatment, the Supreme Court has whittled away the offender’s ability to challenge treatment conditions.\(^{85}\) In _Seling v. Young_, the petitioner-committee maintained that the conditions at Washington State’s commitment center were incompatible with the treatment required by the state’s civil commitment statute.\(^{86}\) Reversing the Ninth Circuit’s opinion, the _Young_ Court explained that the petitioner could not challenge the statute as applied to his particular case because, if courts allowed such individual challenges, they could never conclusively determine whether a particular scheme on its face was punitive in violation of the double jeopardy and _ex post facto_ clauses.\(^{87}\) The Court underscored that, although barred from as-applied challenges, petitioners could challenge the conditions and treatment regime at the commitment center through other means: a state cause of action if the treatment center failed to fulfill its statutory duty, a § 1983 civil rights action alleging unconstitutional deprivations in the conditions of confinement,

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82. _Hendricks_, 521 U.S. at 371 (Kennedy, J., concurring).
83. _Id._ at 378 (Breyer, J., dissenting). Breyer concluded that the Kansas scheme, which conceded Hendricks’s condition was treatable but delayed such treatment until Hendricks completed his prison term—so that further incapacitation was therefore necessary—and provided only inadequate treatment thereafter, was not tailored “to fit the nonpunitive civil aim of treatment.” _See id._ at 396 (Breyer, J., dissenting).
84. _Id._ at 382–83.
86. _Id._ at 260.
87. _Id._ at 263; _see also id._ at 263–64 (“Permitting respondent’s as-applied challenge would invite an end run around the Washington Supreme Court’s decision that the Act is civil in circumstances where a direct attack on that decision is not before this Court.”). In the _Young_ dissent, Justice Stevens argued that courts should consider conditions of confinement in as-applied challenges in order to gain “full knowledge of the effects of the statute.” _Id._ at 277 (Stevens, J., dissenting). According to Stevens, if Young’s allegations—concerning both the absence of treatment and the starkly punitive character of the conditions of his confinement—were correct, the statute should have been characterized as a criminal law for federal constitutional purposes. _Id._
or a facial challenge to the statute. In sum, substantive due process requires that the nature of commitment, including treatment, bear some relationship to the objectives of the commitment. Ex post facto and double jeopardy prohibitions are implicated where a lack of treatment renders a purportedly civil scheme unconstitutionally punitive. Yet, the constitutional right to treatment is limited in scope due to the deference courts grant to the legislature’s stated intent and to the Young decision that restricted the avenues available for individuals to challenge their commitments.

Because civil commitment schemes cannot, under statute and the Constitution, hold sex offenders once treatment renders them no longer dangerous or no longer in possession of a mental abnormality, it would seem that treatment is a gateway to release. Yet, as Part III observes, treatment fails to open gateways because few, if any, sexually violent predators are ever released from commitment. Even more shockingly, treatment ostensibly closes gateways because prosecutors use treatment records to create the proof necessary for continued confinement.

III.

THE REALITY OF TREATMENT

In practice, states provide inadequate treatment services and make it exceedingly difficult for committed persons to obtain release from civil commitment. Rather than enable the offender to overcome his sexual deviancy, treatment often engenders further confinement by providing the prosecution with incriminating records.

The disclosure of treatment records in civil commitment proceedings violates neither the doctrine of privilege nor the defendant’s constitutional right to privacy. Courts and statutes provide several justifications for overriding the psychotherapist-patient privilege and for admitting treatment-related testimony as relevant evidence in civil commitment proceedings. First, some courts have found that a psychotherapist-patient privilege never attaches in sex offender treatment because medical examinations are not intended to be confidential.

88. Id. at 265–67. The Court referred to a pending § 1983 action that would address the conditions of confinement at the Washington facility. Id. at 265–66. The Court noted:

The [Special Commitment] Center operates under an injunction that requires it to adopt and implement a plan for training and hiring competent sex offender therapists; to improve relations between residents and treatment providers; to implement a treatment program for residents containing elements required by prevailing professional standards; to develop individual treatment programs; and to provide a psychologist or psychiatrist expert in the diagnosis and treatment of sex offenders to supervise the staff. Id. at 266.

89. Foucha v. Louisiana, 504 U.S. 71, 79 (1992) (holding that the continued detention of an insanity acquittee is “improper absent a determination in civil commitment proceedings of current mental illness and dangerousness”).

90. See, e.g., People v. Martinez, 105 Cal. Rptr. 2d 841 (Ct. App. 2001); Appeal in Pima
Second, some courts hold that, while the privilege attaches, testimony of sex offenders’ therapists falls within an exception for communications relevant to proceedings to compel hospitalization for mental illness.91 This also applies to involuntary treatment.92 Finally, many civil commitment statutes expressly override the statutory privilege, if applicable, by specifying that all relevant evidence is admissible.93

In addition to the inapplicability of state privilege, offenders do not have a constitutionally protected expectation of privacy in their treatment records. In the case of civil commitment—where the need to protect the public is great and the disclosure limited—the governmental interest in obtaining information outweighs the individual’s privacy interest.94 Moreover, sexually violent predator evaluations fall within two established exceptions to the confidentiality of medical communications: the exception for public health and safety, and the exception for communications made to a physician for a potential adversary’s purpose rather than for curative treatment.95

Thus, unprotected by privilege or privacy, treatment records and treatment-provider testimony constitute admissible evidence in civil commitment proceedings. This Part discusses the use of discoverable treatment records at each stage of the civil commitment process, the ensuing treatment disincentive, and the societal effect of the treatment disincentive.

A. Treatment Records Play a Critical Role in Civil Commitment Hearings

Prosecutors, experts, and fact-finders consider sex-offender treatment records at nearly every step of the sex offender civil commitment process, a consistent practice among states.96 The assessment process usually begins six to

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92. See In re Deville, 610 So. 2d 1070 (La. Ct. App. 1992) (finding physician-patient privilege did not apply to bar admission of mental patient’s medical records and oral testimony of treating physician in judicial commitment proceeding where the court ordered continued confinement and treatment of the patient).
93. See, e.g., MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 123A, § 9:
   Evidence of the person’s juvenile and adult court and probation records, psychiatric and psychological records, the department of correction’s updated annual progress report of the petition, . . . and any other evidence that tends to indicate that he is a sexually dangerous person shall be admissible in a hearing under this section.
94. Seaton v. Mayberg, 610 F.3d 530, 534-35 (9th Cir. 2010).
95. Id.
twelve months prior to an offender’s release from prison. The responsible
department screens incarcerated sex offenders for risk factors and refers
inmates who appear to be most dangerous for a face-to-face expert evaluation
by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist. Following the expert evaluation, a
prosecutor reviews the files of those individuals assessed to meet the criteria for
commitment and determines if sufficient evidence exists to file a petition for a
probable cause hearing. If the court finds probable cause, the offender
receives a trial, at which a judge or jury determines whether the offender meets
the criteria for a “sexually violent predator.”

In most states, committed individuals are confined indefinitely with yearly
evaluations until they are no longer considered dangerous to the community. The
majority of states require that sexually violent predators serve their
commitment time in secure inpatient facilities. Arizona, Illinois, and Minnesota
hospitalize some sexually violent predators when necessary but emphasize
community treatment programs. Texas is the only state that conditionally
releases sexually violent predators to outpatient treatment, where they are
subject to polygraphs, penile plethysmograph, and global positioning system
(GPS) monitoring, and are under the supervision of a case manager.

Expert evaluations play a critical role in the sex offender civil
commitment process. Not only do expert psychologists conduct the initial
evaluation, but they also testify at trial regarding two of the three statutory
requirements for sexually-violent-predator commitments: the respondent’s
alleged mental disorder and the likelihood he will engage in future acts of
sexually harmful conduct. The final element—a past sexually violent
offense—is usually not contested at trial because each state has formulated
statutes that list which acts constitute sexually violent offenses and, typically,
the screening committee only refers offenders who have been convicted of such
offenses to the commitment process.

97. Id.
98. Id.
99. Id.
100. Id.; NIETO, supra note 35, at 3–4, 7–8; ROXANNE LIEB & SCOTT MATSON, SEXUAL
101. NIETO, supra note 35, at 3.
102. The penile plethysmograph measures changes in blood flow in the penis. For sexual
offenders, it is typically used to determine the level of sexual arousal as the subject is exposed to
sexually suggestive content, such as pictures, movies, or audio. It has been demonstrated to be one
of the most accurate methods for identifying which sexual offenders will go on to commit sexual
crimes against children. See R. Karl Hanson & M.T. Bussière, Predicting Relapse: A Meta-
Analysis of Sexual Offender Recidivism Studies, 66 J. CONSULTING & CLINICAL PSYCHOL. 348
103. NIETO, supra note 35, at 4.
104. See supra text accompanying note 24.
105. See Rebecca L. Jackson & Derek T. Hess, Evaluation for Civil Commitment of Sex
Treatment records—including completion of treatment, treatment failure, or refusal to participate in treatment—heavily affect the expert’s evaluations and testimony. To determine future dangerousness, expert psychologists utilize actuarial instruments such as the Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offense Recidivism (RRASOR), the Static-99, or the Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool-Revised (MnSOST-R). Each of these instruments utilizes mainly “static” (unchangeable) risk factors. In the MnSOST-R, treatment history is one of the sixteen items that affect the expert’s assessment of whether a sex offender meets the statutory requisites for civil commitment. In addition to looking at static risk factors and assessment by actuarial instrument, evaluators often assess “dynamic” variables, such as criminal attitudes, social influence, and hostility, which may be documented in treatment records. Evaluators are also influenced by some factors that are not empirically based but which incite strong emotional reactions. For example, evaluators invariably recommend for commitment offenders who articulate during treatment that they would commit another sexually violent act if released.

Rebecca Jackson and Derek Hess observed that states require expert

106. Eric S. Janus, Minnesota’s Sex Offender Commitment Program: Would an Empirically-Based Prevention Policy Be More Effective, 29 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 1083, 1122–23 (2003) (“In these processes, treatment failure is viewed as increasing the risk of sexual recidivism and suitability for commitment, while treatment success decreases these concerns. Non-entry into treatment, on the other hand, is seen as neutral, neither increasing nor decreasing risk.”).

107. The RRASOR, developed by Dr. Hanson, consists of four items: (1) having prior sex offenses, (2) having a male victim, (3) having an unrelated victim, and (4) being between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years old. DENNIS M. DOREN, EVALUATING SEX OFFENDERS: A MANUAL FOR CIVIL COMMITMENTS AND BEYOND 123–24 (2002).

108. In addition to the RRASOR’s four items, the other items on the Static-99 include (1) number of sentencing occasions, (2) conviction for noncontact sexual offense, (3) conviction for nonsexual violent offense at same time as index sexual offense, (4) conviction for nonsexual violent offense prior to index sexual offense, (5) any stranger victim to sexual offense, and (6) if the offender ever lived with a lover for two consecutive years. Id. at 125–27; ANDREW HARRIS, AMY PHENIX, R. KARL HANSON, & DAVID THORNTON, STATIC-99 CODING RULES, REVISED (2003), available at http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/rep/fl/2003-03-stc-cde-eng.pdf.

109. The sixteen MnSOST-R items are (1) number of sex-related convictions, (2) length of sexual offending history, (3) having been under supervision when committing a charged sexual offense, (4) having committed a charged sexual offense in a public place, (5) having used force within any charged sexual offense, (6) having done multiple acts on a single victim within a charged sexual offense, (7) number of victim age groups for charged sexual offenses, (8) history of victimizing thirteen- to fifteen-year olds within any charged sexual offense, (9) stranger victim within charged sexual offense, (10) evidence of adolescent antisocial behavior by offender, (11) history of drug or alcohol abuse, (12) employment history, (13) discipline history while incarcerated, (14) chemical dependency treatment while incarcerated or on release, (15) sex offender treatment while incarcerated or on release, and (16) age of the offender. DOREN, supra note 107, at 127–31.


111. See MnSOST-R items, supra note 109.


examinations to determine whether an offender meets statutory criteria, yet no state provides clear guidance or standards for the expert’s conduct.\textsuperscript{114} Hence, the researchers undertook a survey of experts who conduct sex offender civil commitment evaluations with the aim of identifying the “usual practice” of these evaluators.\textsuperscript{115} Table 1 reproduces their findings with regard to the importance of documentation—including reports, evaluations, and records—in conducting civil commitment evaluations. Jackson and Hess asked respondents to report the degree of importance for each source on which they relied by rating the document as essential, recommended, optional, irrelevant, or contraindicated. The results show that sex offender specific-treatment records (80.5% essential) were most essential to the evaluation, followed by police reports (78%), institutional records (75.6%), mental-health treatment records (53.7%), victim reports (53.7%), and pre-sentence evaluations (51.2%). The majority of respondents considered all other forms of documentation as either recommended or optional.

| Table 1: Use of Documents in Civil Commitment Evaluations\textsuperscript{116} |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Victim reports                  | Essential       | Recommended    | Optional        | Irrelevant      | Contraindicated |
| Victim reports                  | 53.7% (22)      | 43.9% (18)     | 2.4% (1)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Police reports                  | 78% (32)        | 22% (9)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Previous psychological evaluations | 41.5% (17)     | 56.1% (23)     | 2.4% (1)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Pre-sentence evaluations        | 51.2% (21)      | 48.8% (20)     | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Institutional records           | 75.6% (31)      | 22% (9)        | 2.4% (1)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Mental health treatment records | 53.7% (22)      | 41.5% (17)     | 4.9% (2)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Sex offender specific treatment records | 80.5% (33) | 19.5% (8)     | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Juvenile records                | 34.1% (14)      | 61% (25)       | 4.9% (2)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| School records                  | 7.3% (3)        | 53.7% (23)     | 34.1% (14)      | 4.9% (2)        | 0% (0)          |
| Military records                | 4.9% (2)        | 51.2% (21)     | 36.6% (15)      | 7.3% (3)        | 0% (0)          |
| Employment records              | 7.3% (3)        | 51.2% (21)     | 39% (16)        | 2.4% (1)        | 0% (0)          |
| Medical records                 | 22% (9)         | 56.1% (23)     | 22% (9)         | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |
| Criminal trial transcripts      | 19.5% (8)       | 41.5% (17)     | 39% (16)        | 0% (0)          | 0% (0)          |

Not only are sex offender treatment records the most relied-upon documentation, but they also play a critical role at each stage of the commitment process. Specifically, experts evaluate the respondent and decide whether to refer him for civil commitment; testify at the initial commitment trial; and, if the individual is committed, evaluate the respondent and testify at each and every hearing for release.

\textsuperscript{114} Jackson & Hess, supra note 105, at 429.
\textsuperscript{115} Id.
\textsuperscript{116} Id. at 431 tbl.2, copyright © 2007 by SAGE Publications. Reprinted by Permission of SAGE Publications.
Treatment records may exist at the time of the initial commitment hearing because many state correctional systems either require or provide incentives for sex offenders to participate in prison-based specialized sex offender treatment programs before they are paroled to the community.\textsuperscript{117} Thirty-four states offer specialized sex offender treatment for incarcerated persons. Of the programs offered by these states, twenty-eight are at least one year long, including eight programs that last more than three years.\textsuperscript{118} Eighteen of the programs include components designed to facilitate an inmate’s transition back to the community.\textsuperscript{119} Some states, including California, do not currently provide prison-based sex offender treatment.\textsuperscript{120} Once an individual is committed to a state institution, all states with civil commitment programs offer or require treatment.\textsuperscript{121}

Finally, judges and juries are extremely deferential to expert evaluations. In practice, commitment hearings tend to be “non-adversarial episodes” in which judges appear to “rubber stamp” the recommendations of clinical expert witnesses.\textsuperscript{122} Studies show that judicial agreement with expert witnesses ranges from 79 to 100 percent and most frequently exceeds 95 percent.\textsuperscript{123} Hence, treatment records, as incorporated into the expert’s evaluation and presented to the judge or jury as determinative, strongly affect an offender’s chances of release.

Although this Section focuses primarily on the use of treatment records by expert evaluators and witnesses, screening committees also take treatment records into account when choosing whether to refer an offender for evaluation,\textsuperscript{124} and prosecutors consider treatment indicators when determining

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} \textsc{Nieto}, supra note 35, at 11 (citing \textsc{Colo. Dep’t of Corrections, State Sex Offender Treatment Programs: A 50 State Survey} (2000)).
\item \textsuperscript{119} Id. at 16.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Id. at 49–50 (suggesting that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation should create a prison treatment program that would include development of sex offender treatment guidelines).
\item \textsuperscript{121} See \textsc{supra} Part II.A.
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textsc{Winick}, supra note 1, at 143 (2005) (discussing commitment of mentally disordered offenders and sexually violent predators generally).
\item \textsuperscript{124} See, \textit{e.g.}, N.H. REV. STAT, § 135-E:15(I) (“In order to protect the public, relevant
whether to file a probable-cause petition.\textsuperscript{125} Thus, disclosures made in sex offender treatment, as well as professional assessments about performance in treatment, play a key role in referrals for commitment, the initial commitment case, and post-commitment hearings.

\textit{B. Current Legislative Schemes Give Sex Offenders a Strong Incentive to Refuse Treatment}

The use of treatment records at every stage of the civil commitment and post-commitment process is not necessarily a bad thing. Theoretically, treatment records could help offenders prove they are fit for release, for example, by showing that they are no longer dangerous due to successful treatment. Moreover, inclusion of treatment records at trial arguably ensures the constitutionality of civil commitment proceedings by encouraging fact-finders to base their determination on present dangerousness or a current mental abnormality, as reflected in the recent treatment reports, rather than penalizing offenders for past sexual transgressions (which would render commitment unconstitutionally punitive). However, this Section observes that, on balance, the discoverability of treatment records does more harm than good by discouraging sex offenders from participation in treatment and disadvantaging those who do participate.

Sex offenders have a strong incentive to refuse treatment for three reasons: (1) during treatment, participants must confess to additional crimes or admit guilt to sexual transgressions and these admissions may be used against the participant in future court proceedings; (2) failure to complete treatment weighs in favor of commitment; and (3) completion of treatment does not correlate with release from commitment. These three reasons are discussed in more detail below.

\textit{1. Treatment Records May Be Used in Furtherance of Commitment}

The treatment process requires that the offender admit guilt, accept responsibility, and produce other incriminating documentation.\textsuperscript{126} Most treatment providers agree that successful treatment necessitates disclosure of past offenses and “a careful analysis of the thoughts, feelings and decisions which preceded past offenses.”\textsuperscript{127} Moreover, entry into the treatment program, itself, generally requires offenders to admit responsibility for the offense

\textsuperscript{125} Janus, supra note 106, at 1122.
\textsuperscript{126} Anita Schlank & Rick Harry, The Treatment of the Civilly Committed Sex Offender in Minnesota: A Review of the Past Ten Years, 29 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 1221, 1224 (2003).
\textsuperscript{127} Id. (citing McKune v. Lile, 536 U.S. 24 (2002)).
underlying the conviction. 128

Texas, for example, provides sexually violent predators with a five-stage treatment program monitored by polygraph at each stage. In Stage 1, offenders must accept responsibility for their acts and learn to control their aggression. 129 This requires admitting guilt, with the confession’s veracity confirmed by polygraph examination. In Stage 2, offenders detail their sexual histories and pass a polygraph to ensure the history’s accuracy. 130 Honest reflection regarding sexual arousal and sexual behaviors helps to facilitate the offender’s self-confidence and self-worth. Stage 3 focuses on the offense cycle and adaptive behaviors; this requires cataloguing and confirming by polygraph the actual events, feelings, and plans that the sex offender goes through prior to offenses. 131 Stage 4 focuses on positive sexuality and relationship issues. 132 A penile plethysmograph is used to identify the sex offender’s sexual preferences, which are then explored and dealt with in treatment through behavioral interventions. Stage 5 involves relapse prevention and intimacy. Offenders learn to avoid situations in which they might reoffend and prepare for release into the community. 133 Texas’s program—including treatment phases, admission of guilt, construction of a sexual history, and use of polygraphs—resembles other state treatment programs. 134 Offenders who refuse to admit and accept responsibility for past offenses are declared unamenable to treatment and are rejected from the treatment program. 135

Everything that an offender confesses during these multiple stages of treatment—including sexual fantasies, uncharged offenses, and gruesome details regarding sexual offenses—is discoverable. Because treatment records provide “excellent sources of information about prior acts,” prosecutors teach each other to obtain otherwise private treatment data as part of the pre-petition review to

130. Id.
131. Id.
132. Id.
133. Id.
135. Heim, supra note 117, at 1223; see also, e.g., Johnson v. Fabian, 711 N.W.2d 540, 543 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006) (explaining that the sex offender treatment program requires the offender to admit his offense and to discuss its specifics before being admitted to treatment, and that refusal to discuss the offense was considered a disciplinary violation).
determine whether to proceed with a commitment.136 Public defenders often advise sex offenders not to partake in treatment because nonparticipation will “increase their chance of being unconditionally released, or not committed at all.”137 Offenders echo this concern, refusing to enter treatment because “their attorney advises them not to [participate]” and because “if they enroll, their written treatment assignments, assessments, and progress notes will be subpoenaed by the courts and used to prove they continue to need inpatient detainment and treatment.”138

2. Treatment Failure, More than Non-Participation, Increases the Likelihood of Commitment

The second treatment disincentive arises from the fact that treatment status, and in particular non-completion of treatment, affects whether an individual will be referred for commitment and ultimately committed.139 Treatment success or failure is an item in the Minnesota Sex Offender Screening Tool-Revised.140 In the MnSOST-R calculations, treatment failure is viewed as increasing the risk of sexual recidivism and suitability for commitment, while treatment success decreases these concerns.141 Non-entry into treatment, on the other hand, is seen as neutral, neither increasing nor decreasing risk.142

Because sex offender treatment programs have significant failure rates and offenders do not know in advance whether they will complete treatment successfully, an offender “might conclude that the safest bet is to avoid treatment altogether.”143


138. Id.; see also WASH. STATE INST. FOR PUB. POLICY, SEX OFFENDER SENTENCING IN WASHINGTON STATE: WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE PRISON TREATMENT PROGRAM 3 (2006) (“[T]he law authorizing civil commitment of sexually violent offenders could motivate some sex offenders to decline participation because revelations during their treatment about additional victims or violence could later be used as reasons for the state to file a Sexually Violent Predator petition.”); Mareva Brown, Special Report: Sexual Predators Evading Treatment, SACRAMENTO BEE, Feb. 12, 2006, at A1 (“Some Atascadero offenders list the court trials among their justifications for shunning therapy: They fear information from those sessions could arise in their hearings[,]”).

139. See Janus, supra note 106, at 1124.

140. See supra note 109 and accompanying text.

141. DOREN, supra note 107, at 127–31.

142. Id.

143. See Janus, supra note 106, at 1124.
3. Treatment Completion Provides No Positive Incentive for Participation

Not only does an offender’s poor performance in treatment harm his chance of release, but good performance in treatment provides no countervailing positive incentive to participate. Very few individuals—approximately 0.9 to 4 percent of those committed—are ever released from inpatient commitment facilities, the result being that “civil commitment for sexual dangerousness is, as a practical matter, a life sentence.”

Because states are not releasing sexually violent predators, including those who complete the entire institutional treatment program, patients perceive no benefit in participating in sex offender treatment. In addition, sexually violent offenders feel disillusioned by a system that provides no way out and are reticent to take part in any aspect of the system, including treatment. Offenders believe that “participating in treatment legitimizes a system they feel unfairly and illegally keeps them incarcerated after they have completed their prison sentences.” This frustration with the system “may actually produce feelings of worthlessness and loss of dignity, exacerbating the mental illness and perhaps even fostering a form of learned helplessness that can further
diminish performance, motivation, and mood in ways that can be antitherapeutic.”  

Thus, sex offenders have a strong incentive to refuse treatment because discoverable treatment records and failure to complete treatment have an incriminatory effect on both the initial commitment trial and post-commitment reviews. Moreover, sex offenders lack any countervailing positive incentive to participate in treatment because the completion of treatment does not enhance their likelihood of non-commitment or release from civil commitment.

Empirically, many offenders in involuntary commitment centers have refused treatment. For example, only 25 to 30 percent of sexually violent predators consent to participate in the active phases of California’s sex offender treatment program. In Washington, slightly more than half of the committed offenders participate in inpatient treatment. Wisconsin has a higher treatment-participation rate of approximately 83 percent for committed “sexually violent persons,” and 72 percent when considering both committed and detained persons in the sex offender commitment system.

C. Enhanced Participation in Treatment Has Societal Benefits

As the above discussions demonstrate, there is a Catch-22 inherent in sexually violent predator treatment. On one hand, minimum treatment efforts are a statutory and constitutional requirement. Treatment gives offenders a chance at release, and full and candid treatment has positive mental and behavioral effects on the offender. On the other hand, all treatment records are discoverable and heavily relied on by experts, with the result that treatment participation disadvantages the very offenders that treatment purports to help. Treatment requires that offenders recount their sexual offenses, which in turn leads treatment providers, the judicial system, and the public to believe that the offenders continue to contemplate sexually violent acts and are still dangerous. This Section examines whether, apart from being constitutionally and statutorily required, treatment is something society should encourage. Doubts about the efficacy of treatment were central to the critique of the early sexual psychopath commitment laws and persist today.

Researchers and policymakers “have yet to agree on whether treatment effectively reduces sexual recidivism.” This lack of consensus stems from

149. Winick, supra note 1, at 146 (2005).
150. D’Orazio et al., supra note 137, at 27.
152. See supra Part I discussing sexual psychopath laws from the 1930s to 1980s.
153. See supra Part I discussing sexual psychopath laws from the 1930s to 1980s.
154. R. Karl Hanson et al., First Report of the Collaborative Outcome Data Project on the Effectiveness of Psychological Treatment for Sex Offenders, 14 SEX ABUSE: J. RES, &
inherent difficulties with the evaluation of sex offender treatment programs. For example, researchers attempting to compare groups of treated and untreated sex offenders encounter underreported recidivism rates across both groups, one must wait many years before treatment effects can be detected, and treatment programs have changed considerably in recent years, rendering older studies unrepresentative of current treatment effectiveness.

One way to increase the power of statistical research is to aggregate studies through meta-analysis, which combines the results of multiple individual studies and creates a sample size sufficient to detect even small effects. Meta-analysis shows promising results for the effectiveness of sex offender treatment programs overall. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Hanson et al. reported sexual offense recidivism rates of 9.9 percent for treated versus 17.3 percent for untreated subjects, and general offense recidivism rates of 32 percent for treated versus 51 percent for untreated subjects. A comparison of sixty-nine treatment studies, including thirty-one from the United States, seventeen from Canada, and twenty-one from other countries, confirmed a positive treatment effect, finding an 11.1 percent average sexual-recidivism rate for the treated group as opposed to a 17.5 percent average sexual-recidivism rate in the comparison group. While pharmacological or hormonal treatments have the highest mean effect with regard to reducing recidivist tendencies, cognitive-behavioral and classical-behavioral approaches also have significant treatment effects.

TREATMENT 169, 170 (2002).

155. Id. (citing R. Karl Hanson & Monique T. Bussière, Predicting Relapse: A Meta-Analysis of Sexual Offender Recidivism Studies, 66 J. CONSULTING & CLINICAL PSYCHOL. 348 (1998)) (explaining that, on average, only 10 to 15 percent of sex offenders are detected committing a new sexual offence within four to five years); see also David Lisak & Paul M. Miller, Repeat Rape and Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists, 17 VIOLENCE & VICTIMS 73, 73–74 (2002) (discussing undetected rapes and citing estimates that between 64 and 96 percent of all rapes are never reported to criminal justice authorities).

156. Hanson et al., supra note 154, at 170.

157. Id. at 188 (finding that older treatment programs were associated with a slight, but nonsignificant, increase in sexual recidivism, but that studies of these programs are no longer applicable because the treatment of sex offenders has changed considerably since the 1970s).

158. See id. at 170–71 (summarizing meta-analyses conducted by Alexander, Hall, and Gallagher et al., each of which reported a significant overall treatment effect, but challenging their methodologies).

159. Id. at 187 (2002). These numbers reflect recidivism rates among individuals who participated in “current treatments,” defined as any treatment currently offered and cognitive-behavioral treatments offered since 1980. Id. at 187. The recidivism rates for individuals who participated in other forms of treatment were not as low: averaged across all studies, the sexual offense recidivism rate was 12.3 percent for treatment groups and 16.8 percent for comparison groups. Id. at 181.


However, sexually violent predators—who have designated mental illnesses and pose a high risk of reoffending—may respond differently to treatment than the average sex offender analyzed in these meta-analyses. Few studies focus on high-risk prison inmates who, similarly to sexually violent predators, receive treatment in secure state hospitals. Thus, the Clearwater Treatment Program—a high-intensity inpatient sex offender program in a Canadian federal maximum-security correctional treatment facility—provides a valuable case study. The Clearwater Program study followed moderate-to-high-risk sex offenders who had completed a six-to-nine-month long cognitive-behavioral treatment program. Significant group differences were observed between the treatment group and the control group at each stage of follow-up: 5.9 percent versus 13.6 percent after two years; 11.1 percent versus 17.7 percent after three years; 16.9 percent versus 24.5 percent after five years, and 2.8 percent versus 32.3 percent after ten years. A related study examined the sexual-violence recidivism rates for the forty-five “psychopathic sex offenders” in the Clearwater Program over a ten-year follow-up period. Psychopathic offenders who failed to complete the cognitive-behavioral treatment program were more likely to recidivate violently but not more likely to recidivate sexually than those who completed the program. Researchers studying the Clearwater Program concluded that high-intensity treatment programs can decrease a moderate-to-high-risk sex offender’s risk of sexual recidivism in both the short and long run.

Not all studies of sex offender treatment programs report a positive treatment effect. One of the most comprehensive studies, California’s Sex Offender Treatment and Evaluation Project (SOTEP), compared the recidivism rates of offenders treated in an inpatient relapse prevention program with the rates of offenders in two untreated control groups, one containing offenders who volunteered for treatment and the other containing offenders who had not volunteered. The study found no significant differences among the three methods; see also Hanson, supra note 154, at 173 (explaining that, although many treatment approaches exist, “treatment providers have increasingly put their faith in some version of cognitive-behavioral treatment”).

164. Id. at 529, 531.
165. Olver & Wong, supra note 162, at 330–31. Psychopathic sex offenders are high-risk and high-need offenders with diagnosed mental abnormalities as evaluated by the Psychopathy Checklist–Revised (PCL–Revised). Id. at 328.
166. Id. at 331.
167. Id. at 335.
168. Janice K. Marques et al., Effects of a Relapse Prevention Program on Sexual Recidivism: Final Results from California’s Sex Offender Treatment and Evaluation Project
groups in the rates of sexual or violent offending over an eight-year follow-up period. Although the SOTEP study did not focus on high-risk offenders, the positive treatment effect was greatest for the high-risk members of the “got it” group, which had an overall recidivism rate of 10 percent, as opposed to the high-risk group that did not meet program objectives, which had a recidivism rate of 50 percent. However, one could criticize that the “got it” group results were founded upon post hoc analysis of the data.

Finally, with regard to persons found to be sexually violent predators but eventually released from civil commitment, sexual recidivism is “essentially non-existent.” One sex offender civil commitment program reported a charge of child pornography that occurred prior to release; but there were no incidences of sexual recidivism in the remaining programs, including outpatient programs.

These studies show that, in many situations, specialized sex offender treatment is better than no treatment with regard to lowering the likelihood of recidivism. Because treatment appears to be at least minimally effective, encouraging treatment achieves the statutory and constitutional aims of protecting society (state police power) and caring for mentally ill persons (state parens patriae power).

(SOTEP), 17 SEX ABUSE: J. RES. & TREATMENT 79 (2005). The offenders in this study were high-risk prison inmates who had completed a two-year intensive cognitive-behavioral treatment in a secure state hospital, similar to civil commitment hospitals for sex offenders, and a one-year aftercare program. Id. at 83.

169. Id. at 88 (finding 21.6 percent of the volunteer treated subjects sexually reoffended; 20 percent of the volunteer control group sexually reoffended; and 19.1 percent of the nonvolunteer control group sexually reoffended). However, the SOTEP study did not focus on high-risk offenders similar to the sexually violent predator population, id. at 102, and a positive treatment effect may have been present for shorter follow-up periods, Janice K. Marques, How to Answer the Question: “Does Sex Offender Treatment Work?”, 14 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 437 (1999) (finding the treatment group performed slightly better than the volunteer and nonvolunteer control groups with regard to violent recidivism, and slightly better than the nonvolunteer control group with regard to sex offense recidivism, but neither finding was statistically significant); Janice K. Marques et al., Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment on Sex Offender Recidivism: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study, 21 CRIM. JUSTICE & BEHAV. 28 (1994) (finding that the treatment group had the lowest reoffense rates for both sex and other violent crimes, though the results were not statistically significant).

170. Marques et al., supra note 168, at 102.

171. Id.

172. Id.

173. D’Orazio et al., supra note 137, at 9.


175. Id.
Apart from treatment effectiveness, two additional considerations stem from the provision of treatment. First, treatment should be encouraged, regardless of its general effectiveness, because it allows treatment providers to determine those offenders fit for release. Researchers have found that offenders who display good treatment behavior or have good post-treatment scores are less likely to recidivate, either sexually or violently. Thus, encouraging treatment could help treatment providers identify which offenders lack mental illness or have responded to treatment, thereby supporting their petition for release.

Second, the treatment disincentive affects those sex offenders who never enter the civil commitment system. Inmates may opt out of treatment during their penal incarceration—prior to civil commitment—to decrease their chances of commitment. As a consequence, inmates who do not qualify as sexually violent predators will be released into society without any sexual rehabilitation or relapse-prevention training and often with no remaining parole time with which to enroll in treatment. Many treatment programs provide valuable transition skills and training to help offenders adapt to life outside the prison setting. Assuming treatment can be effective in curbing recidivism, states should encourage participation for these offenders who will reenter society.

IV. POLICY PROPOSALS

The treatment paradox arises when committed sex offenders view treatment—provided by states under their parens patriae authority to care for their citizenry—as contributing to their continued confinement. Currently, no statutory or constitutional remedies exist by which sexually violent predators can challenge the use of treatment records by the prosecution in furtherance of their confinement. As Part II points out, the current treatment scheme violates no statute or constitutional provision. While there may exist a right to the bare minimum provision of treatment, there is no statutory or constitutional obligation for states to provide a treatment regimen that individuals will elect to take. Because courts are extremely deferential to the legislature’s stated objectives, it is up to the state legislatures to revamp their statutory schemes to confront this treatment paradox.

This Part explores three policy proposals that would alleviate the treatment paradox by encouraging participation in treatment while ensuring that expert psychologists can make fair and accurate assessments and that society can continue to confine those individuals who meet the criteria for a sexually violent predator. First, mandatory treatment would ensure that all offenders take part in treatment. Alternatively, an outpatient treatment program would

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176. Marques et al., supra note 168, at 102; Olver & Wong, supra note 162, at 334.
177. See supra text accompanying note 119.
encourage participation by coupling mandatory treatment with the positive incentive of freedom from restraint. Finally, an enhanced psychotherapist-patient privilege would counteract the incriminating effect of treatment participation by removing treatment documents and reports from courts’ reach. In each of these alternatives, states should make real efforts to release those offenders who successfully complete treatment, thereby creating a positive incentive for offenders to participate in treatment.

A. Mandatory Treatment

Mandatory treatment for civilly committed persons would solve the disincentive inherent to discoverable treatment records by giving offenders no choice but to participate in treatment. Required treatment has survived constitutional challenge for reasons of state police power, protection of citizens, and the decreased privacy interest of sexually violent predators. Indeed, some states’ existing statutory schemes already require treatment.

However, while required treatment would achieve universal participation in treatment, it raises a corollary concern that, without privacy protections, sexually violent predators will not candidly partake in the treatment and treatment may not be as effective. Amenability to treatment and successful rehabilitation hinge upon eliminating denial and replacing it with an admission of responsibility for past sexual deviancy. This is a difficult hurdle for sex offenders, who are particularly likely to deny their offenses. As such, a

178. See Melissa M. Matthews, Comment, Closing the Loophole in California’s Sexually Violent Predator Act: Jessica’s Law’s Band-Aid Will Not Result in Treatment for Sexual Predators, 39 McGeorge L. Rev. 877, 897–900 (2008) (explaining that required treatment would not violate a sexually violent predator’s constitutional rights and would be effective). However, mandatory treatment may be considered an invasion of the constitutional right to privacy and personal autonomy. See, e.g., Jarvis v. Levine, 418 N.W.2d 139, 145, 148–49 (Minn. 1988) (stating that there is a protected privacy interest in the individual’s right to choose to refrain from taking neuroleptic drugs); Price v. Sheppard, 239 N.W.2d 905, 910–11 (Minn. 1976) (discussing the plaintiff’s claim that his right of privacy was violated by being required to undergo electroshock therapy while involuntarily committed to a state mental health facility).

179. See supra note 48 and accompanying text.

180. See Karen J. Terry & Edward W. Mitchell, Motivation and Sex Offender Treatment Efficacy: Leading a Horse to Water and Making It Drink?, 45 INT’L J. OFFENDER THERAPY & COMP. CRIMINOLOGY 663 (2001) (discussing the debate regarding the efficacy of treatment for sex offenders); Robert M. Wettstein, A Psychiatric Perspective on Washington’s Sexually Violent Predator’s Statue, 15 Puget Sound L. Rev. 597, 618 (1992) (“In enforced treatment, patients come to view their therapists as their jailers, agents of the state, and punitive authority figures. Involuntary patients learn to minimize symptoms, ingratiate their therapists, and seek forgiveness. The reciprocal, mutual, trusting relationship in voluntary mental health treatment is often reduced to a game of manipulations by the patient and staff in involuntary treatment.”).

181. Mack E. Winn, The Strategic and Systematic Management of Denial in Cognitive/Behavioral Treatment of Sexual Offenders, 8 SEXUAL ABUSE: J. RES & TREATMENT 25, 26–27 (1996); see supra Part II.B.1 (explaining that treatment programs almost universally require that offenders admit responsibility for the offense underlying the conviction as a condition of entry and continued participation in the program).

182. Winn, supra note 183, at 26–27.
supportive and nurturing atmosphere, bolstered by an understanding of confidentiality, is essential for successful treatment.

Studies show that confidentiality correlates with openness and willingness to talk about one’s sexual offenses. One assessment found that:

If treatment is to be effective, relationships must be built between therapists and abusers that foster openness, disclosure, honesty, and change. As with all human beings, sex abusers need to believe they will be treated with dignity and professionalism before they will let their guard down and risk being vulnerable.

Moreover, researchers report a clear relationship between how cohesive members of a treatment group report to be, the extent to which freedom of action and expressions of feeling are encouraged in the groups, and treatment outcome as measured by significant reductions in pro-offending attitudes. Development of a cohesive group leads to higher engagement, an environment conducive to disclosure through feelings of maintained confidentiality, and development of hope that the participants’ situation can change.

Thus, while required treatment could overcome the first hurdle of treatment participation, it could not guarantee honest participation in treatment. Without an assurance of confidentiality, sex offenders lack incentive to partake candidly in the treatment and treatment may not be as effective.

**B. Outpatient Treatment**

Outpatient treatment better negates the treatment disincentive of discoverable treatment records. In addition to requiring mandatory treatment, the system encourages participation because offenders enjoy freedom from restraint and nonparticipation could result in criminal reimprisonment.

Texas’s outpatient program provides a promising model of this carrot-and-stick approach. Texas commits those sex offenders found to be “sexually violent predators” into an outpatient program that includes intensive sex offender treatment, electronic monitoring, polygraphs, penile plethysmographs,

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183. For example, a study by Meg S. Kaplan et al. found that as confidentiality increased in interactions between parolees and parole officers or psychologists, reports of prior sex offenses and current urges to molest increased. Meg S. Kaplan, et al., The Impact of Parolees’ Perception of Confidentiality of Their Self-Reported Sex Crimes, 3 Sexual Abuse: J. Res. & Treatment 293 (1990).


186. Id.

biennial examinations, substance-abuse testing, and restricted transportation. Sex offenders in outpatient treatment must follow strict rules, such as not going near schools or playgrounds, and may be charged with a third-degree felony and sent back to prison for breaking the rules of supervision.

This outpatient model has several advantages. First, it drastically decreases cost: in 2006 the cost to treat a person in the Texas outpatient program was $17,391 per client, as compared to an inpatient treatment program that averaged $97,000 per resident nationally. Second, the Texas program provides legitimate treatment, eliminating concerns that civil commitment will be used to detain those who would be released from prison without treatment or supervision. Third, outpatient civil commitment protects the civil rights of sexually violent predators by allowing them to live in the community rather than in prison-like state hospitals. Even though conditionally released offenders have numerous restrictions, initially they can live with family and gradually they may earn more privileges.

However, some states may find this solution unfeasible because it requires reconceptualizing treatment programs; abandoning inpatient facilities; and finding suitable placements for offenders, a process that can take months. Moreover, outpatient programs are politically unpopular because they place sexually violent predators back in the community.

C. Inpatient Commitment with an Enhanced Psychotherapist-Patient Privilege

Finally, if states maintain an inpatient commitment system, I propose resolving the treatment-disincentive problem by crafting a narrowly tailored psychotherapist-patient exemption. A narrow privilege could prevent sex-offender treatment records and treatment-provider testimony from being introduced at trial, and yet make admissible the state-ordered expert evaluation and information regarding the respondent’s success or failure in treatment.

190. See WSIPP, supra note 25.
193. See California High Risk Sex Offender and Sexually Violent Predator Task Force, Report 5 (2006) (explaining that most landlords decline to rent to sexually violent predators when they become aware of the public notification process and resulting media attention). In one instance, a sexually violent predator received a “homeless” release after none of the 250 potential landlords contacted over the course of one year agreed to rent to him; individuals granted homeless release are difficult to supervise, and it is difficult to enforce the conditions of release, such as curfews. Id.
proposal would encourage more candid participation in treatment and would be easily administrable.\textsuperscript{195}

It is unclear how severely this proposal would handicap the state’s ability to assess a civil commitment candidate’s future dangerousness. Although treatment records are heavily relied on by the prosecution,\textsuperscript{196} many aspects of the sexually violent predator review and commitment system would remain unchanged. For example, the screening process and commitment hearings would still rely on psychologist interviews and assessments of the offender; the defendant could be called to testify during the commitment proceedings allowing firsthand observation by the judge or jury; and the prosecution and court would have access to police reports, victim statements, investigation reports, and other indicators of criminal history, as well as any reports regarding the offender’s behavior during incarceration or parole.

The psychotherapist-patient privilege preserves the delicate balance between protecting the offender’s privacy and disclosing information in the interests of justice. The blanket of confidentiality created by an enhanced privilege hopefully will incentivize sex offenders’ candid disclosure of their offenses and participation in treatment without placing unnecessary burdens on state prosecutors who must put together a compelling case against the highest-risk sex offenders.

**CONCLUSION**

There is a role for civil commitment of the most violent, threatening, and mentally ill of our society. However, involuntary commitment programs must carefully balance the protection of the public with the recognition of the liberty interest of confined individuals. Because these programs must be civil in both form and nature, treatment should be provided in both promise and in reality.

Supreme Court precedent—including Hendricks’ broad language, which seems to condone even meager treatment attempts, and Young’s rejection of as-applied challenges—makes it difficult for sexually violent predators to challenge their commitment and treatment status legally. However, state statutes and the federal constitution clearly indicate that sexually violent predators cannot be civilly confined unless both mentally ill and dangerous. Hence, as long as research shows that mental abnormalities are treatable, and that sexual dangerousness can be mitigated by treatment, the civil commitment system must provide treatment and release for those offenders who have

\textsuperscript{195} To implement this proposal, states could either create a statutory psychotherapist-patient privilege that would apply to treatment records in sexually violent predator hearings. Or, for many states, they need only revoke the evidentiary rules in the civil commitment statute. For example, revoking the provision of Florida’s statute that “[t]he psychotherapist-patient privilege . . . does not exist or apply for communications relevant to an issue in proceedings to involuntarily commit a person under this part.” See FlA. STAT. § 394.9155.

\textsuperscript{196} See supra Part III.A.
successfully completed treatment and are no longer a danger to society. Because courts are extremely deferential to the legislature’s stated objectives, treatment and release policies must be remedied on the state level. A state policy requiring treatment or a bolstering of the psychotherapist-patient privilege in the civil commitment context safeguards the civil rights of sex offenders, encourages sex offenders to take control of their lives through treatment, and provides an economically efficient means by which states can detain only the most dangerous offenders.\footnote{Effective treatment and management of sexual offenders can reduce sexual reoffending, thereby reducing human suffering and the costs associated with the processing and reincarceration of recidivists. Olver, Wong & Nicholaichuk, \textit{supra} note 163, at 522. Moreover, tailored treatment programs ensure that the civil commitment system, which costs taxpayers a yearly average of $97,000 per offender, is reserved for the most dangerous offenders. \textit{See} WSIPP, \textit{supra} note 25.}
APPENDIX I: INVOLUNTARY COMMITMENT AND THE FINE LINE BETWEEN CIVIL AND CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

Civil commitment, although purportedly civil, constitutes an extreme deprivation of liberty. State civil commitment laws often afford heightened statutory protections, listed below, demonstrating the fine line between civil commitment and criminal punishment.

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<th>Right to jury trial</th>
<th>Proof beyond a reasonable doubt</th>
<th>Unanimous verdict requirement</th>
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<td>Ten states require proof beyond a reasonable doubt.</td>
<td>All (fifteen) states with trial by jury require a unanimous verdict.</td>
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