

**SUBJECT:** Defining child-safety zones

**COMMITTEE:** Government Reform — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 6 ayes — Uresti, Otto, Y. Davis, Gonzales, Hunter, Veasey  
0 nays  
1 absent — Frost

**WITNESSES:** For — Bill Carpenter, Houston Independent School District; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Robby Collins, Dallas Independent School District)  
Against — None  
On — Allison Taylor, The Council on Sex Offender Treatment

**BACKGROUND:** Government Code, ch. 508 authorizes a parole panel to establish a “child-safety zone,” which limits how close a parolee convicted of a sexual offense against a child can go to a place where children gather, such as a school, day-care facility, or public swimming pool. A parolee can enter a child-safety zone on an event-by-event basis and under certain conditions.

**DIGEST:** HB 1828 would specify a 1,000-foot child-safety zone and would not permit a parole panel to grant a general exemption from the safety zone requirements, although specific exemptions would be permitted. The panel would notify each principal of a school or director of a facility in the zone if a modification were granted. If a parole officer authorized entry into a child-safety zone on an event-by-event basis, the officer would notify each principal or director 24 hours in advance.  
  
The bill would apply to all parolees who are subject to a child-safety zone, regardless of when or what terms of parole were granted. The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1828 would establish a single standard for child-safety zones so all sex offenders convicted of a crime against children would be prohibited from hanging out where children congregate. The concept of a child-safety zone is well established and often included in a parolee's terms of parole, but the distances vary widely. In addition, some parolees may be granted a blanket exemption to the child-safety zone rule. This bill would preserve specific exemptions so that a parolee could attend a graduation ceremony, for example, but blanket exemptions defeat the purpose of the zone.

In practice, the default zone is 500 feet, which is not far enough from groups of children. The further away a parolee is from where children congregate, the less likely the parolee is to commit another crime. An additional 500 feet would protect children better and not unduly burden parolees in their day-to-day lives.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

This bill would take authority away from parole boards that are the best equipped to decide what terms are appropriate for ensuring a parolee lives lawfully after release. Imposing arbitrary distances or restrictions would not take into account the specifics of individual cases.

Continuing to increase the size of zones where individuals may not pass eventually has the effect of limiting parolees to such narrow geographic locations that they cannot reintegrate fully into society. Patronizing businesses that may be near a place where children gather or joining a congregation at a church with a daycare are activities that would be prohibited to parolees even though shopping and attending church are two activities that could help restore a sense of community in the parolee.