



## **STATE LEGISLATURES HAVE A SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE THE PUBLIC SAFETY OF ONLINE DATING CONSUMERS**

Internet dating is an interesting and rapidly growing phenomenon in the United States today. There is no doubt that companies in this field are providing a valuable service to millions of customers. However, these websites are also providing easy access to those who would prey on innocent, uninformed victims.

Throughout the Nation, various Legislatures have wisely required convicted sex offenders to register with the state so that diligent parents can know at any time if their children are at risk from a nearby predator. What is to stop that same registered sex offender from going on line to contact and arrange a “date” with the woman or man of his/her choice?

Safer online dating legislation supported by a bipartisan group of representatives and senators from across the political and philosophical spectrum have been filed in recent state legislative sessions to address this issue. These bills will require providers of online dating services to provide full disclosure to their users on whether or not they conduct criminal background checks on their participants. If service providers do not conduct criminal background checks, they are required to notify users that they do not provide this safeguard.

### **FACTS ABOUT SAFER ONLINE DATING LEGISLATION:**

- No single solution will eradicate sexual predators from cyberspace, but safer online dating legislation is a major step in the right direction.
- There were 565 cases of individuals attempting to log onto True.com, one of the few service providers who provide criminal background checks, since January 2004 where the individuals were denied access for being married or because of felony criminal records.
- No company would be forced to conduct criminal background checks. Instead, legislation would merely require the disclosure of important safety information that online dating services should be disclosing in the first place.
- In one recent study, 20 percent of online dating consumers believed that criminal background checks are the standard and not the exception for online dating services. This means that many consumers using online dating services may have a false sense of security.

Opponents of this legislation argue that this is “special interest legislation” and “dictates one business model” to an entire industry. The fact is that this legislation does not require background checks; it requires full disclosure to users and is good public safety policy and is the right thing to do to protect honest consumers that use an online dating service. If one vicious predator is allowed to prey on an innocent victim because there were no safeguards in place, the Legislature has failed the online dating community.

State Legislatures have a duty and the opportunity to protect consumers and citizens throughout the Nation. By approving the safeguards outlined in safer online dating legislation we give online daters the knowledge they need to be informed consumers.