

Megan's Law

Megan's Law, signed in 1996 by President Clinton, allows states discretion in establishing criteria for disclosure, but compels them to make private and personal information on registered sex offenders available to the public. It is deemed that such public notification:

1. assists law enforcement in investigations,
2. establishes legal grounds to hold known offenders,
3. deters sex offenders from committing new offenses and
4. offers citizens information they can use to protect children from victimization.

Megan's Story

In July 1994, 7-year-old Megan Kanka accepted an invitation from a neighbor in Hamilton Township, New Jersey, to see his new puppy. The neighbor, Jesse Timmendequas, was a twice-convicted pedophile. He raped her, murdered her, and dumped her body in a nearby park. Megan's parents said that they never would have allowed her to travel the neighborhood freely if they had known that a convicted sex offender was living across the street. Megan's Law later became part of the act in an effort to provide community notification.

It had only been three hours, three hours since Maureen Kanka's daughter Megan had vanished after riding her bicycle with a friend through a perfect summer evening.

Mothers always fear the worst. Maybe Megan had just gone off to visit a friend, she thought. Maybe her bubbly blonde daughter had lingered too long chasing after fireflies. This wasn't a hard luck urban neighborhood where there were potential predators lurking on every street corner. This was Hamilton, a small suburban neighborhood -- not affluent but comfortable, friendly and, above all, safe. Whatever had happened, Megan would be all right. Wouldn't she?

Maureen glanced out the window of her home. Her residential street had been transformed. Police lights cast an eerie blue and blood-red wash over the prim post-war facades of the houses. Television lights flared. Firefighters, cops and volunteers, 300 of them, some from as far away as Bucks County in neighboring Pennsylvania, gathered into platoons, waiting for the order to take their search for the little girl in ever-widening arcs through the backyards and weedlots of Hamilton. It seemed like some horrible nightmare. The lights. The sirens. The television reporters carefully choosing their words to squeeze every last drop of pathos and panic out of the scene.

Maureen had almost been on autopilot when she had spoken to the reporters earlier. She had expressed what any mother would under the circumstances: fear and hope.

"Please, please help us find our daughter," she had told the reporters. "She's a wonderful girl ... she's only seven. Let her come back." Maureen stepped away from the window.

It seemed that everyone in the neighborhood had offered to help. Even that strange, pie-faced man who had just moved in across the street. Jesse something. Jesse Timmendequas. She had spoken to him earlier that night, records would later show. Immediately after Megan failed to come home, Maureen had gone door to door, asking her neighbors if they had seen her. She had run into Jesse. He had told her, yes, he had seen her, earlier that day, while he had been out in the yard working on his car.

There had been rumors about Jesse and the two other men who lived in his rented house. Some said that the men had been in trouble with the law, but no one knew the details. Besides, this funny rag doll of a man with his mop of unkempt blonde hair, his glasses that seemed too big for his face, and that strange little wound on his right hand, a wound that resembled a bite mark, wanted to help.

He offered to carry a picture of Megan. He would put it on a flier, hand it out, he said. Maybe someone would recognize her. It was something.

How could she have known? How could anyone have known that this odd little man would, within 24 hours, lead the searchers through knee-high weeds to the spot where Megan lay dead? Raped. Strangled with a belt, her limp body crammed into a toy box and dumped in a lonely corner of a county park.

How could she have known that Jesse Timmendequas was a monster?