

EXPERT INSIGHT | Americans Combat Child Exploitation

PROTECTING VICTIMS OF SEXUAL CRIMES UNDER KAYLEIGH'S LAW

Kayleigh Kozak

TOPLINE POINT

- ★ The America First approach includes proactive measures to ensure the safety and protection of all victims of sexual crimes, especially children.
- ★ Lifetime injunctions under Kayleigh's Law ensure that once a perpetrator is convicted, the victim receives permanent protection—no additional hearings, no expiration dates, and no more fear.
- ★ Create uniform national standards and strong enforcement of lifetime protective orders so no victim loses safety due to state lines, probation endings, registry relief, or jurisdictional gaps.

Overview

The harm caused by sexual assault is not temporary; it is lifelong. The protections for those who have been sexually violated should be lifelong, too.

I was just 12 years old when my middle school teacher chose to sexually abuse me over a two-year span. In 2006, that man was charged with eight counts of child sexual abuse crimes and was facing 25 years to life in prison, but ultimately pleaded down to two counts, receiving eight months in jail and two terms of lifetime probation. He was convicted of committing multiple sex crimes against a child.

In 2020, I learned that my perpetrator's probation could be terminated at any time. If it ended, every legal safeguard I had would disappear. I would have to return to court, face the man who stole my innocence when I was a child, and relive my trauma just to ask for protection against the person who had already been convicted of sexually violating me again. That experience exposed a critical flaw in our justice system: victims should never lose safety simply because their perpetrator's probation or registration status changes or ends.

A protective order, also referred to as a restraining order, injunction against harassment, criminal order of protection, or civil order of protection, is a court-issued legal tool that prohibits the defendant from having any contact with the petitioner. These orders exist in many variations across the country but differ across states in details such as scope, duration, and enforcement. This makes the protections they strive to offer subjective and inconsistent.

Not all protective orders require a criminal conviction. Civil protective orders, for example, are most often filed directly by the victim and can typically be obtained without any arrest or conviction. These types of orders require less proof to obtain and are temporary. By contrast, criminal protective orders are applied to an active criminal case or conviction, and these types of orders are more extensive in duration and carry stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Ultimately, protective orders are designed through legal avenues to provide safety to a petitioner or victim. However, in most states, even when a heinous crime is committed and an individual is convicted, the conviction remains temporary. They often expire automatically, and specifically in sex crimes cases, when things such as probation, parole, or sex offender registration end, the victim of the crime will lose the protection that was once in place. Even if the offender remains on the registry (this requirement is state-specific), victims frequently must return to court and prove a new threat or recent contact simply to maintain protection. This requirement forces survivors to repeatedly confront their abusers and fight for protection from the person who was convicted of sexually violating them.

Arizona was the first state to enact this specific model in 2022, and the results have been powerful: in its first full year, more than 1,000 victims received lifetime protections. Wisconsin was the second state to pass a similar version of Kayleigh’s Law. A handful of other states—including Indiana, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—also offer some form of lifetime orders, but they are often complex, limited, and difficult to obtain. In [Maryland](#), a victim of a qualifying crime may obtain a permanent protective order, if the respondent was convicted of the act of abuse underlying the original protective order and sentenced to at least five years in prison (with at least 12 months served), or if the respondent committed a subsequent act of abuse against the same victim while the protective order was in effect and met the same sentencing requirements, or if the respondent consents to the order. Though the states listed do have versions of a permanent protective order, many of these could be more uniform and stronger. Still, the vast majority of states and the federal government leave victims vulnerable.

Kayleigh’s Law closes this gap. It allows judges to issue lifetime no-contact injunctions at the time of sentencing. What makes Kayleigh’s Law unique is that these lifetime orders are issued at the time of sentencing, unlike many other states, which require victims to request an additional hearing even after the individual has already been convicted. These orders remain in effect and do not expire, even if the convicted perpetrator’s probation terms or registration requirements change or end. The conviction itself is sufficient grounds for the order. These injunctions prohibit all contact, cannot be appealed by the offender, and remain in effect for the perpetrator’s natural lifetime—unless the victim chooses to lift them. A direct violation of this order would result in a Class 1 misdemeanor.



In February 2026, I had to return to court again for the same reason as in 2020. Only this time, before entering the courtroom, I witnessed my abuser being served with a natural life injunction under Kayleigh’s Law in the state of Arizona. I now have permanent protection from the man who was convicted of sexually abusing me as a child. The solution is simple and overdue. Every state and the federal government should pass strong lifetime protection laws modeled on Arizona’s successful Kayleigh’s Law. A federal version would create much-needed uniformity throughout the nation, help protect victims who live in different states from their abusers through enforceable interstate injunctions, and ensure these protections extend meaningfully to those on tribal lands. Victims of sexual crimes deserve lasting safety and freedom from the fear of being forced to face their abusers repeatedly for basic protection from the person who has been convicted of sexually violating them.

Background

Throughout the United States, sexual crimes are defined and punished differently from state to state. Orders of protection and injunctions exist with [different variations](#) and durations to shield victims from further harm by the person who violated them. However, in most states without reform and enhancements, these orders are currently tied closely to the length of the [offender’s sentence, probation, or parole](#).

When those periods end, protection often disappears automatically, even if the offender is still required to register as a sex offender. Standard restraining orders typically require the victim to return to court and demonstrate that there have been recent threats, harassment, or contact. This process forces survivors, especially those who were abused as children, to repeatedly re-engage with their perpetrator simply to maintain basic safety.

The need for permanent protection is urgent. Sexual violence creates lifelong trauma, and many survivors live with realistic fear due to what happened to them. A victim whose perpetrator has been convicted of committing a certain crime should not have to continue to be revictimized by having to continuously go back to court to prove they were already victimized. The victim should be—and is—worthy of having protection from the person who has violated them. On top of this, nearly every state allows some sort of [relief from the registry for convicted sex offenders](#) (particularly those who are categorized in the lower levels or tiers). In many states, offenders can petition to be removed from the registry after [10 to 25 years](#). In other states, convicted sex offenders may be required to remain on the sex offender registry, but are able to have the terms of their probation shortened or terminated. These requirements often fall under the purview of victim protection. But when an offender’s probation is terminated, or registry requirements end, any linked protections for victims vanish as well.

Kayleigh’s Law ([A.R.S. § 13-719](#)) directly addresses these gaps. In Arizona, judges can issue lifetime no-contact injunctions against convicted perpetrators of sexual offenses and certain other dangerous crimes at sentencing. Additionally, in Arizona, a victim whose perpetrator was convicted of certain crimes may petition to obtain this type of order at any time after their perpetrator’s conviction. However, in Wisconsin, due to its state constitution, the protection is not retroactive and is only



available to victims of crimes committed on or after January 1, 2023. The orders prohibit all contact and remain in effect for the offender’s lifetime unless the victim requests termination or the defendant or victim dies. Violation of the injunction is a Class 6 felony. In Arizona, Kayleigh’s Law has already delivered real impact, giving victims lasting peace of mind and reducing the burden of repeated court appearances. Other states with lifetime options vary in strength, but Arizona’s framework—where the crime itself justifies the order—has proven effective and serves as the strongest model for nationwide reform.

Kayleigh’s Law decouples victim protection from the convicted offender’s changing status. The conviction itself would justify a lifetime no-contact injunction. An individual who becomes a victim due to another person’s actions does not stop being a victim just because the convicted defendant’s status or conditions may change post-conviction. Sexual violence creates lifelong trauma. Approximately [70%](#) of rape and sexual assault victims experience moderate to severe distress, higher than for any other crime. Arizona’s proactive approach to conviction justifies the need for a permanent order of protection, and eliminating the possibility for a victim having to face their perpetrator again does not just extend protections for victims of convicted offenders; it empowers them to continue on their healing journey.

Recommendations

To protect victims of these crimes more effectively and close gaps in the system, policymakers should take the following steps:

- **Implement a federal model:** Enact a federal version of Kayleigh’s Law to set a strong precedent for all 50 states, create a uniform national standard, resolve interstate enforcement challenges, enable faster law enforcement response to out-of-state violations, and extend meaningful protections to victims on tribal lands.
- **Require entry into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC):** Mandate that all lifetime protective orders be uploaded to the NCIC database, so they are immediately accessible to law enforcement nationwide.
- **Make the conviction itself sufficient:** Judges should have clear discretion to issue lifetime no-contact injunctions at sentencing based on the conviction, pairing the permanent order of protection directly with sex-offender convictions rather than tying it solely to the length of probation, parole, registry requirements, or community notification.
- **Establish strong enforcement:** Include clear, serious felony-level penalties for any violation of a lifetime protective order, based on Arizona’s model, meaning any violation of this specific permanent order of protection would result in an additional felony charge.



- Support victims proactively: Ensure victims receive automatic notification when a lifetime injunction is available at sentencing or upon the end of supervision.
- Track and evaluate results: Require states to collect and report data on the issuance and impact of lifetime injunctions to measure effectiveness, build evidence, and refine the policy over time.

Victims of sexual crimes deserve more than temporary relief that expires with their abuser’s supervision. They deserve lifelong safety and the security of knowing they will never be forced to face their perpetrator in court again simply to protect themselves. Kayleigh’s Law is a proven, bipartisan solution that puts victims first. It is time for the rest of the country to follow Arizona’s lead.

