Right path for sex offenders

When Megan's Law of 1994 was enacted one of the chief complaints was that requiring police to alert residents of convicted sex offenders in their neighborhood wasn't enough. More needed to be done, critics said, to prevent recidivism.

The state parole board's recent decision to take a more proactive role in monitoring sex offenders responds to that criticism in a responsible way. Among the steps taken is a requirement that paroled sex offenders participate in weekly therapy sessions run by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, which will be paid for, at least in part, by the parolees. The convicts also will be required to submit to polygraph tests if there are signs they are violating parole by, for example, lurking around a playground.

And finally, the parole board is bringing local, county, state and federal law enforcement officers together with parole officers to share information to help identify sex offenders who may be on the brink of committing a new crime. A conference was held this week in Camden and another is planned for next week.

Together these efforts represent a comprehensive approach to what is a complex and growing problem. Currently, there are 4,600 sex offenders on life-time parole in New Jersey — the largest sex offender caseload in the United States. Another way of measuring the depth of the problem here is that one-third of all parolees in the state are sex offenders. And that number grows by 45 every month.

The recidivism rate for the worse sex offenders is extremely high. Reversing that trend is going to require more than simply posting a picture on a website. Combining therapy with lie detector tests while beefing up information-sharing are same ways to tackle the problem.