

Rapist heading to St. Paul, joins ranks of sex offenders being released

He's among six offenders freed in the past year, unprecedented for a program that has confined offenders indefinitely.

By Chris Serres (<http://www.startribune.com/chris-serres/10645926/>) Star Tribune

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A twice-convicted rapist with a history of assaults against women is about to be released from the state's secure sex offender treatment program to a halfway house in St. Paul.

Oliver Lenell Dority, 50, who sexually assaulted a woman in 1994 after hiding in the back seat of her car at a gas station, is the latest in a growing number of violent offenders who have been approved by state judges for conditional release since the Minnesota Sex Offender Program (MSOP) came under intense federal court pressure for failing to adequately move people toward release.

In just over a year, six offenders have been conditionally discharged from MSOP — an unprecedented pace for a program with a history of confining rapists and other violent offenders indefinitely, sometimes for decades, with little opportunity for release.

The releases reflect a loosening of Minnesota's notoriously rigid and labyrinthine process for determining which MSOP clients are appropriate for release, with state officials and judges showing more willingness to discharge people with violent histories and some risk factors for reoffending.

The releases are also arousing far less political controversy than in years past — reflecting a possible easing of attitudes toward offenders, say experts.

All of the offenders approved for discharge over the past year are repeat rapists.

They include Robert Jenó, who sexually assaulted two women while he was a teenager; Benjamin Gissendanner, who twice raped a St. Paul college student after breaking into her apartment, and Christopher R. Coker, who raped three teenage girls in separate incidents in the early 1990s.

The commissioner of Human Services plans to appeal Coker's discharge, saying experts do not believe he is ready for release into the community.

Little public outcry

But the others have been discharged with little or no public acrimony.

"Where is the drama? Where is the political hue and cry?" asked a sarcastic Warren Maas, president of the Minnesota chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. "The vicious rhetoric that we've seen in the past against sex offenders has really subsided."

To some legal experts, the recent releases are merely evidence that professionals at MSOP are taking seriously their duty to provide treatment and move people through the program.

Last June, U.S. District Judge Donovan Frank declared the program unconstitutional after concluding that MSOP was detaining untold numbers of offenders who no longer met the state's criteria for confinement.

Though Frank's ruling is under appeal, the state has been under increased legal pressure to demonstrate that it provides offenders actual treatment and a clear path toward release.

Currently, the MSOP holds about 720 rapists, child molesters and other offenders, who have already completed their prison terms, at secure treatment centers in Moose Lake and St. Peter.

'Notable' improvement

Like many at MSOP, Dority has a long list of criminal offenses. In 1995, he was convicted of raping two women within three weeks of each other.



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_1455075227)
Dority

He served consecutive prison terms of 81 months and 84 months for these offenses. He also has convictions for a number of nonsexual offenses, including assault, violation of an order for protection, robbery, fleeing the police and domestic assault, according to court papers.

Yet Dority has shown "notable treatment gains" since he was committed to MSOP in August 2009, according to a judicial panel reviewing his case.

He requested more time in group therapy and was an active participant. He was moved to the final phase of treatment, where he participated in support groups and volunteered in the community with a staff member present, court papers said.

In a recent assessment, Dority was determined to have a "moderate-low risk" for reoffending sexually.

The risk factors identified in the evaluation included "hostility toward women" and "general social rejection," among others.

"Capacity for relationship stability will remain a risk factor until [Dority] lives in the community with a healthy partner for at least two years," the assessment said.

Public meeting in St. Paul

Even so, a three-judge panel concluded that Dority's treatment needs "could be met through community-based sex offender treatment, support groups and supplemental individual therapy," according to a January ruling approving his provisional discharge.

Dority is expected to be released within days to a 38-bed halfway house in the 500 block of Ashland Avenue in St. Paul, where he will live under heavy surveillance. This includes GPS monitoring, face-to-face visits and surveillance by 24-hour staff. Any violations could result in his return to MSOP.

The St. Paul Police Department is holding a public meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, 285 N. Dale St., to notify neighbors.

Twitter: @chrisserrres

chris.serres@startribune.com 612-673-4308 chrisserrres