

# Senate OKs final three of 14 'Ashley's Laws'

**□ The State Senate unanimously approved three more bills to get tough on sex offenders.**

AUSTIN (AP) — The Texas Senate on Tuesday unanimously approved three more bills to get tough on sex offenders and child molesters, completing passage of 14 measures known as "Ashley's Laws."

Those bills, now pending before the House, include a "three strikes and you're out" sentence, public notification when sex offenders are released and creation of child safety zones at parks, schools and other locations.

They are named for 7-year-old Ashley Estell of Dallas, who was abducted from a Plano park, molested and killed in 1993 by a paroled sex offender who had served 18 months of a 10-year prison sentence.

"We have set public policy that's going to say children are important to us in Texas," said Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, the bills' sponsor.

"If you commit a crime against one of our children, you will pay a special price. We will have special laws that will deal with you," she said.

Approved Tuesday were bills to:  
— Create an automatic sentence of 40

years without possibility of parole for third-time offenders convicted of a first-degree felony sex offense against a child. The sentence would require two prior felony convictions, one of which must be for a sex offense against a child.

The measure also would require a favorable psychiatric evaluation and a two-thirds vote of the full Board of Pardons and Paroles for a convict to obtain parole.

— Establish child safety zones by requiring sentencing judges to bar sex offenders from participating in programs that include children and going near areas where children gather, including schools, parks and swimming pools.

This bill also would require the sentence of community supervision for a sex offense be raised to a minimum of five years.

— Require public notification when a sex offender is released back into a community, including publishing of notice in a local newspaper.

The bill also would require courts or prisons to register convicted sex offenders before their release and require registration of offenders who move to Texas from other states.

"The mentality that we've had with child molesters is let them come back into the community and let them continue to do their dastardly deeds. What we have finally said is no more. This is not going to happen

again," Ms. Shapiro said.

She said she wasn't worried that public notification might cause harassment of convicted offenders.

"I am more concerned today about the safeguards for the citizens, about the community, about the empowerment of the community. For the first time I believe we are looking at elevating the rights of the law-

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— Sen. Florence Shapiro  
R-Plano, the bills' sponsor

abiding citizens and the victims above the rights of the criminals," she said.

If the House approves the 14 bills and Gov. George W. Bush signs them into law, Ms. Shapiro said Texas would have the nation's toughest laws regarding sex offenders.

In other action Tuesday, the Senate adopted revisions to the state's penal code that would increase punishment for those convicted of non-violent "state jail" felonies.

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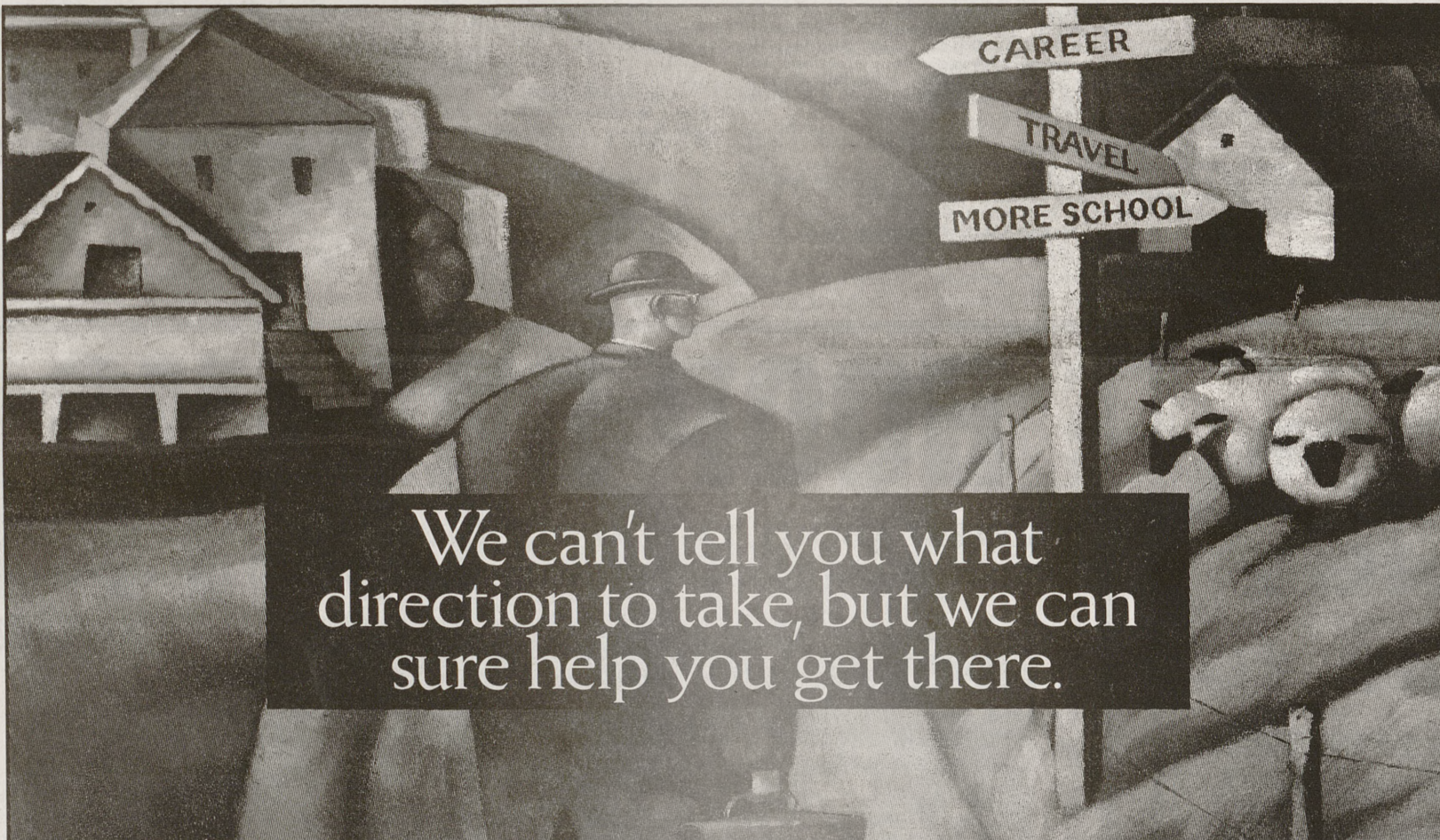
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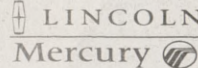
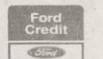
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