

Blaming home school for Perris child torture is like blaming trenchcoats for Columbine

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Last month, a malnourished 17-year-old girl escaped a house in the inland Southern California town of Perris and called the Riverside County sheriff using a purloined cellphone. She reported her brothers and sisters were being held captive by their parents in squalid conditions. The girl was so diminutive, authorities didn't believe at first the teen was as old as she said.

Then the cops walked into a horror show that shocked the nation and the world. The girl's 12 siblings, ranging in age from 2 to 29, were roped or shackled with chains and padlocks to their excrement-encrusted beds. They were sick, hungry and afraid. Police said the family dogs looked fine, though.

The parents, David and Louise Turpin, now face a long list of felony charges, including torture, child abuse, false imprisonment and abuse of adult dependents. If justice exists, they will never breathe free air again.

Would it be rude to note that parents of public school students also beat, starve, and molest their children? Why not subject every parent to an annual inspection to prevent such abuse?

Extraordinary crimes raise big questions: How could this have happened? How did the parents get away with torturing their kids for decades? Didn't anyone notice something strange going on? What might be done to prevent it from happening again?

Unfortunately, big questions usually have complicated and unsatisfactory answers. We don't like those, so the press and a gaggle of commentators and interest groups have alighted on an easy one: Let's crack down on home schooling.

Evidently, the Turpins home-schooled their kids. Keeping the kids at home probably made it easier to conceal their crimes.

Home schooling is one of the few activities left in the Golden State that isn't heavily regulated. Around 200,000 kids are schooled at home in California. Families need only file an annual affidavit with the state Department of Education and register as a private school.

Well, that's way too easy for some people. The problem, as ever, is "lack of reasonable regulation" (because nobody ever wants the "unreasonable" kind). If only the Turpins had been subjected to regular inspections by

qualified state agents, these crimes may never have occurred.

Oh, please.

Blaming home schooling for this atrocity is like blaming trenchcoats for the Columbine High School massacre in 1999 – which, in effect, is what the Denver School Board did. The two killers had worn dusters, so the board banned students from wearing long coats thereafter, as if that would have made a difference.

The Turpins registered their home as a private school. The Turpins abused their children in the privacy of their home. Therefore, let's erode people's privacy and call it "reasonable" and "accountability."

"It's an outrageous suggestion," said Debbie Schwarzer, an attorney with the Home School Association of California, "one that amounts to suspecting all home-schooling parents of being unfit, of being capable of crimes against their children."

Would it be rude to note that parents of public school students also beat, starve, and molest their children? Why not subject every parent to an annual inspection to prevent such abuse?

Because that would be an "unreasonable" regulation. (Give it a few more years.)

OK, how about this: We know some public-school teachers sometimes abuse and molest their students. In 2012, Los Angeles police arrested elementary school teacher Mark Berndt on two-dozen charges of committing lewd acts on children as young as 5 years old. Berndt eventually pleaded no contest and is currently serving a 25-year sentence.

Turns out, district officials knew Berndt was trouble as early as 1983. The Los Angeles Unified School District ended up paying more than \$200 million to Berndt's victims. Incredibly, the district also paid Berndt \$40,000 to resign. The district said that was cheaper than going through the process of firing the creep, who, by the way, had the full backing of his union.

Here's the part that should make your blood boil: Lawmakers voted down several bills that would have streamlined the process of firing teachers like Berndt. The California Teachers Association argued that such a law would have jeopardized other teachers' due-process rights by blowing out of proportion an extraordinary incident.

Home-schoolers don't have a powerful union, though. So let's crack down on them.

Ben Boychuk is managing editor of American Greatness and a regular columnist with the Sacramento Bee.