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Ice cream ordinance can prevent tragedy

The ice cream truck is a familiar, and often welcome sound, for children every summer. Children ask their parents for money, then run outside, down the block, to catch the ice cream man.

But what if the ice cream man has a criminal history? In Allentown, N.H., a man once convicted of first degree murder obtained a license to drive an ice cream truck. No background check, no fingerprints, just a \$50 fee for a peddler's license. In May, the man was arrested on felony prostitution charges, allegedly soliciting sex from a 14-year-old boy. According to current state law in New Hampshire, even if he is found guilty on the prostitution charges, the man can apply for another license and be back behind the wheel of an ice cream truck.

The Clark Township Council on Monday night adopted an ordinance that would prevent a similar situation from happening here. Second Ward Councilman Patrick O'Connor proposed an ordinance that would require criminal background checks for those applying for vending and peddling licenses. At the suggestion of Mayor Sal Bonaccorso, the ordinance also includes a provision for a color-coded decal that would clearly signify whether ice cream trucks and other vendors are operating with a valid license.

These common-sense measures are long overdue in a society, where, for good reason, all teachers, coaches and church workers must submit to a background check. But an ordinance is not enough — in fact it is useless if not enforced.

In Phoenix, where ice cream vendors must submit to fingerprinting and a background check, a 9-year-old girl was raped and impregnated last June, allegedly by an ice cream vendor operating without a license. Officials were quoted as saying that enforcing the ordinance was a low priority.

O'Connor's ordinance, police enforcement, and, of course, the watchful eyes of parents can prevent tragedies such as those that have already happened across the country.

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