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## **Online Matchmaker Urges Criminal Disclaimer**

TALLAHASSEE - People looking for love on the Internet sometimes turn out to be older, paunchier and generally less attractive than the people described in their profiles. But are they also more dangerous?

Two Tampa lawmakers are pressing legislation requiring online dating services to disclose whether they conduct criminal background checks on their subscribers.

“You don't know who's typing away on these sites. You don't know what their intentions are,” said Republican Sen. Victor Crist, sponsor of Senate Bill 1768. “If you're sitting on a bar stool, it's impossible for the person you are flirting with to have a disclaimer on their jacket, but on the Internet you can have that disclaimer.”

Sites without criminal research would be required to prominently post this unseductive warning:

“No criminal background check is done on members who use this service. Please take appropriate measures to increase awareness of possible risks associated with dating.”

The legislation is being introduced at the behest of the Florida lobbyist for a small dating service, True.com, which appears to be the only site that researches its clients' criminal and marital histories.

The site's founder, Herb Vest, a successful Texas entrepreneur and Republican donor, has launched a 50-state campaign for the legislation and has traction in the state capitals of Michigan and his home state.

“Unfortunately, people are being harmed and manipulated,” True.com spokeswoman Taylor L. Cole said. “We reject on a regular basis 5 percent of applicants because of a prior criminal or sex conviction.”

Competitors, such as Match.com, say the legislation would erase years of work to destigmatize relationships found online.

“There are numerous ways that people meet: supermarkets, bars. Why single out online sites?” asked Match.com spokeswoman Kristin Kelly, who said her company had rejected the use of background check services because they are invariably incomplete and would provide “a false sense of security.”

Kelly said the legislation may have been introduced as a marketing ploy by True.com and carried in the Legislature on the basis of a misunderstanding by lawmakers, “a bunch of folks in their 50s and 60s” less familiar with modern technology and what she called the “added safety” of corresponding without divulging personal information.

Kevin Ambler, R-Tampa, the House sponsor of the legislation, rejected that claim, saying, ``Unlike meeting someone in your local gym or in a restaurant where you can look someone over and ask around town, you don't have the use of all your instincts and all your senses when you meet someone on the Internet."`