



# THE STOUFFER REPORT

**Senator Bill Stouffer**  
Senate District 21

**Capitol Building, Room 332**  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

**For the Week of:**  
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## Ensuring Traffic Tickets go to True Offenders

As the weather gets warmer and Missouri families begin planning summer vacations, Missouri's roads and highways are bound to get a little more cramped. With families packing up the car and heading to Missouri attractions, there is always the possibility of drivers trying to shorten their trip by speeding. And while speeders should be ticketed, some Missouri towns have attempted to load their budgets by unfairly ticketing drivers. Fortunately, legislation cracking down on these frustrating speed-trap communities is on its way to being passed in the Senate.

Senate Bill 951 requires cities that earn more than 35 percent of their general revenue from traffic tickets to send all excess revenue to the state Department of Revenue. This bill is not designed to punish local governments, but to keep them from using their police departments as a means of pestering non-resident drivers with unreasonable ticketing, which is unfair to drivers and potentially damaging to Missouri tourism.

To be sure, Missouri has a history of speed-trap communities. Perhaps best known for the unscrupulous practice is Macks Creek, in Camden County. By 1994, three-quarters of this small town's budget was coming from traffic tickets. Macks Creek's five police officers were writing an estimated 2,900 traffic tickets, worth approximately \$165,000, each year. But the lion's share of these fines were being paid not by residents, but by vacationers headed to Lake of the Ozarks.

Residents and drivers often complained that, coming into town, the speed limit decreased on a steep downhill slope, and local law enforcement would not give drivers time to slow down. There were also allegations of dirty tricks, such as roadway obstructions that would send drivers into the wrong lane, for which additional tickets would be issued.

After enough complaining from drivers and local business operators, who were suffering from the Macks Creek's bad reputation and unhappy that the town was not seeing improvements even with the revenue boom, a local lawmaker finally stepped in. In 1995, the state passed legislation prohibiting cities from using traffic-ticket revenue for more than 45 percent of their budgets. However, speed-trap towns continue to operate, notably in Pike County, where one community was the subject of a USA Today story on the controversy over speed traps. We are working to lower the revenue threshold to 35 percent to contain this practice and keep Missouri communities honest.

Law enforcement is charged with protecting citizens and locking up criminals, not generating revenue. SB 951 ensures that Missouri municipalities are not abusing their authority to fill their treasuries.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by email at [bstouffer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:bstouffer@senate.mo.gov).

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