

Senator John Loudon's SLAPP Legislation Earns Initial Senate Approval

Bill Protects Private Citizens From Public Officials' Reprisals

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate this week gave first-round approval to legislation sponsored by Senator John Loudon, R-Ballwin, shielding citizens from “SLAPP” (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) lawsuits. A second passing Senate vote moves Loudon’s bill to the House of Representatives. House passage sends the measure to the governor’s desk.

SLAPP suits are filed by elected officials against private citizens with the unspoken but undeniable objective of silencing public criticism and stifling petitioning activities. Loudon’s legislation, SB 807, provides for a speedy legal hearing to dismiss SLAPP lawsuits launched by members of local or state governing bodies. The legislation also allows citizens having SLAPP suits dismissed to recover attorney fees and court costs incurred in having to needlessly expend time, money and effort to defend their right to free speech.

“Voicing opinions on the actions of elected officials and petitioning governments for change are expressly and prominently protected by our nation’s Bill of Rights,” Loudon said. “SLAPP suits are in fact just that – a slap to the faces of concerned constituents willing to speak their peace and a swipe at undermining the core tenets of the United State Constitution.”

A St. Louis County circuit judge last year dismissed a libel lawsuit filed by Creve Coeur's mayor who claimed a group of community residents had engaged in libel and slander when they publicly criticized the handling of committee appointments.

"Other unwitting defendants haven't been so lucky and remain mired in a judicial system designed by the nation's founders to serve, not restrict the people," Loudon said. "My legislation will serve as a strong deterrent to those who would seek to stifle public comment by lawsuit and enacts deserved monetary penalties on elected officials insistent on filing frivolous SLAPP suits."

United States Constitution
Bill of Rights
Amendment I – The Five Freedoms

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."