

Senator John Loudon's SLAPP Legislation Earns House Hearing

Bill Shielding Citizens From Public Officials' Wrath Close to Passage

JEFFERSON CITY – Having already cleared the Senate, legislation sponsored by Senator John Loudon, R-Ballwin, shielding citizens from “SLAPP” (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation) lawsuits was presented this week in a public hearing by a House panel. As in the Senate, Judiciary Committee approval moves the bill to the chamber floor for debate by the full body. Final House approval moves the measure to the governor’s desk.

Officials elected to public office file SLAPP suits against private citizens as a mechanism employing the courts to silence public criticism and suppress petitioning activities. Loudon’s rights-restoring legislation, SB 807, provides for rapid court proceedings to dismiss SLAPP lawsuits launched by elected officials. The measure also allows citizens successfully fending off SLAPP suits to recoup attorney fees and court costs incurred by expending time, energy and money defending a Constitutional right to be heard.

“Voicing opinions on the performance of public office holders and petitioning governments for reformation are two guaranteed freedoms granted by our nation’s Bill of Rights,” Loudon said. “The judicial branch is in place to uphold, not suppress these rights.”

Loudon notes that many opinion givers have been unjustly forced to become defendants in what amount to frivolous lawsuits.

“A judge last year dismissed a libel lawsuit filed by Creve Coeur’s mayor claiming residents had engaged in libel and slander by offering criticism, but the threat to free speech remains very real today,” Loudon said.

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.”