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**GENERAL ASSEMBLY GIVES FINAL APPROVAL TO LEGISLATION  
FIXING A FLAW IN MISSOURI'S SEXUAL PREDATOR LAW**

JEFFERSON CITY -- The General Assembly today gave final approval to legislation that will make it a Class D felony for those sentenced to Missouri's sexual predator program to escape from the facility in which they are confined. Sen. Matt Bartle, R-Lee's Summit, served as the Senate handler and the House sponsor was Rep. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington, of House Bill 1215 which corrects a mistake in the 1998 bill that created civil commitment for repeat sexual offenders.

Currently it is a crime in Missouri to escape from a jail or prison, and escape from a mental facility is a crime if the escapee was sent there in a criminal process, such as found not guilty but insane. However, there is no provision that makes it a crime to escape from civil commitment.

"It's such an obvious mistake, and one that could be easily exploited," said Bartle.

The loophole in this law became evident in 2001 when sex offender Thomas Ingrassia escaped from the Sexually Violent Predator Unit located in Farmington. Although razor wire fences equipped with motion detectors surround the facility, Ingrassia managed to cut through and escape undetected.

Living in Florida, Ingrassia alluded capture for two years and when finally apprehended, authorities discovered that the only crime he could be charged with was property damage, which carries a penalty of up to four years in prison.

In an interview with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in January, Ingrassia said that he had carefully researched the law in the facility's library and discovered the loophole.

"It's tragic that a sexual predator had to escape from the unit before Missouri realized that there was a problem with this law," Bartle said. "Civil commitment is meant to keep men like Thomas Ingrassia confined until they are completely rehabilitated, and to protect society from those who are deemed to be a continued threat."

Having been passed by the Legislature, HB 1215 will be sent to the governor to sign into law. The bill contains an emergency clause and will go into effect immediately upon being signed by the governor.