

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for
week of April 25, 2005

Missouri Senate Cracks Down on Violent Sex Offenders

Children are naturally trusting and compliant, wanting to make friends and to please. There are few things more precious and beautiful in this life than the giggle of a child or the way kids look with wide-eyed wonder at something that adults have long taken for granted like a shining moon, a rainbow or a bug crawling on the ground. In this wonderful and fleeting time of life called childhood, kids need to be loved, nurtured and protected.

Sadly, too many times this sacred time of life is desecrated by individuals that can only be characterized as evil and vile. One needs look no further than the headlines of the newspaper for proof that our world is marred by stark, unadulterated evil in the form of child predators. A case in point is the tragic story of little Jessica Lunsford from the State of Florida. This precious child came home from church and was put to bed by her grandmother. That night a registered sex offender who had moved into the neighborhood slipped in and abducted little Jessica. It is painful to recount the details of what happened next. For days Jessica was held against her will, raped and eventually buried alive.

There are no words to describe the horror of this crime. But, such evil demands a response by a civilized society. This week the Senate Judiciary Committee that I chair passed a bill modeled after Florida legislation crafted in response to Jessica's murder. This bill mandates that sexual predators wear an electronic monitoring device while they are on parole. Jessica's murderer refused to register his new address and was able to slip in unnoticed to a new neighborhood.

The legislature is set to adjourn for the year in 2 weeks but next year the very first committee hearing of Senate Judiciary Committee will focus on legislation I will be filing to guarantee that repeat child sex offenders will spend the rest of their lives locked away

in a Missouri state prison. Statistics show that pedifiles are seldom cured so they must be put in a place they can never again brutalize and terrorize a child.

On a related note, this week the Missouri Supreme Court struck down part of Missouri's law that protected children from sexual misconduct by adults. In the case, the court overturned the sentence of a man who had a 25-year history of sexual assault and exhibition to children. Unbelievably, this individual was serving as a teacher in a school in St. Louis and was assigned to bathroom duty in the boy's restroom. While the facts of the particular case before the court are disputed, the fact is the court took the remarkable and unfortunate step of striking down the underlying law on a technicality.

This week, I added language to a crime bill in my committee to immediately plug the hole created by the court. The legislation has an "emergency clause" and will become effective as soon as it is signed by the governor rather than in late August like most newly passed bills. The legislature cannot afford stand by and allow pedifiles to take advantage of a court created loophole in our law.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us. Thank you again for making it

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