

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for

Week of July 25, 2005

Getting Serious About Pedophiles

Last April, as the legislative session was winding to a close, I made a promise in my weekly column that was printed in this newspaper. My promise was to file legislation to crack down on child sex offenders in Missouri and to ensure that dangerous repeat predators would spend the rest of their lives in prison.

In that article, I announced that we had drafted language to require repeat sex offenders to wear electronic tracking devices, even after they had completed their sentence and parole, and had tacked it onto another piece of legislation steadily moving through the legislature. This proposal is now law and will become effective on August 28th. But while this measure is a start, I committed to doing more.

Here is an update on where we stand. The legislature adjourned on May 13, and we will not meet again in regular session in Jefferson City until January. While we will meet again in September for a special session, which will be called by the governor for the purpose of considering pro-life legislation and a couple of other designated issues, only a limited number of topics will be allowed to be proposed.

The first opportunity I will have to propose a bill to crack down on child sex offenders will be December 1, when the Senate allows bills to be pre-filed. In early January I will call a meeting of the nine members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which I chair. This committee is responsible for reviewing all proposals that affect the criminal laws of this state. I will present my bill to the members of the committee and we will listen to public comment on the subject. I am confident that this committee will vote to send my bill on to the full Senate for debate.

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Work has already begun, and during the next several months my staff and I will be working on this bill. This will be a dramatic rewrite of Missouri's criminal code on this subject and we want to make sure that it is done well.

Here are the legislation's main points: First, Missouri's mandatory minimum sentences, which are set by law, are too low and must be increased. For example, currently first degree rape of a child less than 14 years old carries a mandatory penalty of only five years in prison. For even younger kids, it is just 10 years. While the maximum penalty can be much greater, and many Missouri judges will hand down stiffer sentences, I want to remove the possibility that such a rapist could walk after only five or 10 years in prison.

The second component of the bill will require dangerous repeat child sex offenders to spend the rest of their lives behind bars. Sexual predators are controlled by evil and vile passions and a civilized society cannot afford to put our kids at risk by allowing these individuals to walk our streets.

It is time to send the message to molesters that if they prey on defenseless children they will pay. Children may be helpless, but we are not. We will rise to defend these kids, and predators will be banished to prison, where they belong.

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.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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