

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for

Week of Nov. 28, 2005

Legislation Filed to Improve Funding for Local Schools

This week marks the unofficial kick-off of the 2006 legislative session. As of last Thursday, the Senate began accepting pre-filed bills that will be debated once we officially convene in early January. I have filed a number of bills but this week I want to highlight a couple that deal with improving education in the “Show-Me State.”

One bill I have filed will help rein in the use of Tax Increment Financing, or TIF, that often have negative impacts on the funding base of local schools.

Tax Increment Financing is a program designed to help finance new development in designated areas. TIF uses tax revenues generated by new economic development projects to help pay for the project’s construction. It does this by allowing the new shopping center or other project to keep a portion of the taxes that would otherwise end up in state coffers in order to offset the cost of construction.

While TIF is a good way to attract businesses to areas in need of economic growth, private developers are becoming increasingly dependent on this form of taxpayer assistance. And, as a result, TIF revenues are skyrocketing, and reform is needed.

TIF can hurt school budgets because commercial growth is responsible for much of the property tax revenue that funds new schools, which are needed in growing areas such as eastern Jackson County. Diverting taxes to development that would otherwise go to schools puts added pressure on the remaining residential tax base, which could lead to families having to pick up the slack.

In response to this trend, I have introduced legislation for the 2006 legislative session that will help stem the excessive growth of TIF. This legislation requires future TIF projects to dedicate at least 10 percent of the tax that would otherwise be used to fund the redevelopment project to any school within the boundary of the TIF area. My hope is that this will be one component in a broader package of needed TIF reforms and will increase the amount of tax revenue going to local schools.

On a related note, another bill I’ve filed for the 2006 session of the General Assembly will also help to increase the funds that local schools receive.

This bill requires school districts located in Jackson County to be fully reimbursed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the costs associated with offering special educational services to children that are in the protective custody of the State of Missouri.

The parents of Jackson County students pay taxes to fund their children's educations, and the state should do its part to help pay for the education of children in its custody. This bill will provide extra funding to local schools and will help ensure that local taxpayers aren't asked to pick up the tab for educating kids who are in the care and custody of the state.

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 or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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