



Sex Offender Legislation Offers Greater Protections for Our Children

JEFFERSON CITY — The primary responsibility of any government is the protection of its citizens. That is why 2006 was such an important year in the Missouri Legislature. Lawmakers this year passed legislation cracking down on sexual predators to ensure that our most dangerous offenders receive adequate prison sentences. Gov. Blunt signed the bill into law June 6, and the measure takes effect immediately because it contains an emergency clause.

Sexual predators who commit crimes against children are going to receive hard jail time under provisions contained in the new omnibus crime bill, House Bill 1698. Under the measure, sex offenders who commit forcible rape or sodomy of a child under age 12 will be sentenced to prison for life without the eligibility for parole for 30 years. Those convicted of enticing or attempting to entice a child for a sexual purpose, whether by Internet or other means, would receive a prison sentence of between five and 30 years.

The measure also gives probation and parole officers access to sex offenders' home computers, requires the Missouri Highway Patrol to operate a toll-free hotline to help disseminate information regarding sex offenders, and allows the publication of sex offender information in newspapers.

The legislation also includes a provision to combat sex offenders who entice children over the Internet, which is increasingly hazardous for children. Law enforcement does not have enough resources to protect our children from Internet predators and child pornographers. As a result, lawmakers approved a program to fund the hiring of more cyber detectives across Missouri to go after Internet predators. So far, lawmakers have appropriated \$250,000 to start the program, and there are initiatives to increase funding in coming years.

This legislation is needed to protect our children and send a message to sexual predators that if they prey on defenseless children, then they will pay. Children may be helpless, but we are not. It is our responsibility to shelter our children from criminals who seek to do them harm.

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 phone at (866) 271-2844.

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