



MISSOURI SENATOR MAIDA COLEMAN

5TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT

MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 220



Contact: Sen. Maida Coleman (573) 751-2606

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Consumer protection measures are focus of Sen. Coleman

JEFFERSON CITY – A pair of consumer protection bills await hearings in the Missouri Senate, and the bills’ sponsor, Sen. Maida Coleman (D-St. Louis), hopes they will move forward quickly.

“One of the bills will prohibit expiration dates or service fees on gift certificates, and the other simply requires that the consumer be forewarned when a package carries with it a radio frequency identification tag,” the minority floor leader said. “These are pro-consumer issues, and I hope they will make it to the floor for debate.”

SB 685 addresses the current business practice by some companies of placing expiration dates or service fees for dormancy on gift certificates. It would also enable consumers to receive remaining balances of a gift certificate in cash if they had used 50 percent of the certificate’s original value. Violations would be considered unfair marketing practices and could be prosecuted as Class D felonies.

“The giver of the gift certificate paid the price for the gift,” Sen. Coleman said. “It should not be subject to devaluation because some company or store does not feel it is being spent fast enough.”

SB 638 would require that a seller of any package carrying a radio frequency identification tag to notify the consumer of its presence with an appropriate label speaking to that effect. These tags are gaining popularity with numerous companies including Wal-Mart which claims it uses them for inventory measures. Industry watchers believe the tags have the capacity to be used as tracking devices for marketing purposes.

“The technology is expanding at breakneck speed, and I believe consumers should know that these devices are attached to the products they are buying,” the senator said. “If Big Brother is listening, we need to know about it.”