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Sen. John Loudon Adds Internet Provision to Sex Offender Bill

Apparent Need Seen Following NBC News Special

JEFFERSON CITY— In response to a Dateline NBC story about child molesters, Sen. John Loudon, R- Chesterfield, has filed legislation to crack down on those who use the Internet to lure children.

Staffers in Senator Loudon's office were shocked when they saw the program, which first aired on Nov 4, 2005, and was repeated over several weekends. The program featured reporters and producers posing as children over the Internet in the attempt to catch Internet predators in the act—a realistic view of just how dangerous sexual offenders can be.

When the Dateline special ran, Sen. Loudon was in the process of writing a comprehensive sex crimes bill. Soon after, a decision was quickly made to address the issues raised by the NBC News investigative report. Senator Loudon drafted a provision to increase the penalties for those who lure children online from a Class C felony (1-7 years in prison) to a Class B felony (5-15 years in prison).

“For too long we have tried to act like this kind of crime does not exist,” Loudon said. “In fact, it does exist. Online predators are some of the most dangerous hidden sexual offenders in our country. If we are to effectively put an end to this gruesome crime, we must first come to the realization that this is an issue officials can no longer ignore. Then we must strengthen our punishment for these crimes in hopes of deterring potential offenders and protecting our children.”

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The bill also aids undercover police officers by providing the same punishment to predators who attempt to lure children, whether they are actually talking to a child or not. The penalty will be the same for both crimes.

Other provisions of Sen. Loudon's bill include stronger penalties for other sexual offenses, more stringent registration requirements for sex offenders and a provision allowing parole officers to search a convicted offender's computer hard drive, software and history when the offender has been placed on parole.

Sen. Loudon sent his thanks to the investigative staff of Dateline NBC.

"I am appreciative when I see journalists uncovering problems in our social system and using their outlets to help protect this great country," Loudon said. "Because of the work they have done in uncovering the world of online predators, we have been given information to make Missouri children safer every day on the internet. It is my hope that other states take heed of NBC News' work and pass similar legislation so that we can protect our most precious and valuable citizens, our children."

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