



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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Sen. Bartle's DNA-Testing Law Catches Violent Criminal

Last week marked the beginning of the legislative session in Jefferson City. However, it was also an important week because Missouri's expanded DNA Profiling System resulted in yet another arrest for a wanted fugitive.

The program, which was expanded in 2004 after the General Assembly passed legislation I sponsored, requires the state to keep DNA samples of all felony offenders in the state. Previously, the program sampled only certain violent or sexual offenders. Samples can be shared among police departments and are used to match DNA taken from other crime scenes. Thus far, the expanded system has resulted in nearly 150 positive matches that would not have been recorded under previous guidelines.

The most recent match occurred Friday, Jan. 6, when a Missouri man was arrested and charged with the sexual assault and murder of a 90-year-old woman from Lafayette, Calif. Detectives in California used a national DNA database to track down the suspect, who was being held at the St. Louis Justice Center on an unrelated drug charge. This despicable crime might never have been solved if the suspect's DNA had not been recorded in Missouri for access by law enforcement officials. Without this common-sense program, the victim's family might never have known who was responsible for such a reprehensible deed, and a community in California would have been gripped by terror of the unknown assailant. More importantly, it was only a matter of time before this predator would have struck again.

However, this is just the most recent example of the success of the expanded DNA Profiling System. In the past year, the “all-felon” testing program resulted in more than 140 crimes solved, including 21 rapes and 16 homicides. The older system would not have produced these arrests, and many of these violent criminals could have been back on the streets—living in our neighborhoods.

It is clear that “all-felon” testing has resulted in the resolution of crimes that would not otherwise be solved. Many individuals who are incarcerated for lesser crimes are often found to be guilty of violent crimes that had not yet been solved.

While this program has only been operational since last January, the funding for it is set to expire this year. One of my highest legislative priorities this session will be to pass a new bill to make this extremely important program permanent.

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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