



Gibbons Capitol Report  
February 19, 2006

### **Making Missouri's Highways Safer**

This week the Senate Transportation Committee voted unanimously to advance Senate Bill 872, a bill I sponsored that stiffens penalties for reckless drivers who endanger lives. The final draft of this comprehensive highway safety bill combines my original "Move Over" legislation with two other important highway safety bills— SB 754, sponsored by Sen. Delbert Scott, R-Lowry City, and SB 669, sponsored by Sen. Chris Koster, R-Harrisonville. The end result is a bill that stiffens penalties for drivers who fail to move over for emergency vehicles, commit offenses in a highway work zone, or injure or kill someone because they fail to yield.

#### **Protecting the Lives of Those Who Keep us Safe**

Four highway patrol officers have been killed while working Missouri traffic stops in the past four years. All four of the officers were struck by vehicles while performing traffic duties with their emergency lights on. Not enough motorists follow Missouri law requiring them to move over one lane or slow down when approaching emergency vehicles parked along-side our highways.

SB 872 will increase the penalties for drivers who fail to move over and slow down when they approach emergency responders on Missouri's roads, from a Class B misdemeanor to a Class A misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail or a maximum fine of \$1,000.

Highway Patrol Troopers' wives Mrs. Cheryl Floyd and Mrs. Jennifer Sampietro testified in support of increasing the penalties for those involved in accidents like the ones that killed their husbands. They testified in favor of legislation that can help prevent other highway patrolmen and emergency responders from dying in the line of duty.

Mrs. Sampietro testified that she was afraid her husband and Cheryl's husband may not be the last ones and that it is just a matter of time before another Trooper is killed. It is my hope that with tougher penalties and better awareness Missouri drivers will learn from these sobering stories. We want to make Missouri's highways safer for the bravest of our citizens.

Our brave highway patrolmen and emergency responders work everyday to save lives. With this measure, we can do something to save theirs. Missouri drivers should slow down, stay alert and move over when they see emergency lights on the road. When reckless drivers speed through emergency scenes, they put countless lives in danger and deserve to face a tougher penalty.

### **Encouraging Missourians to Slow Down in Work Zones**

Also included in the bill is legislation pertaining to highway work zone safety. The measure increases a number of penalties for people who drive recklessly or endanger the life of highway workers while driving through a work zone.

The statistics are sobering. Between 1999 and 2003, there were nearly 6,000 injuries and 97 deaths that occurred in Missouri highway work zone crashes. Three MoDOT employees were killed and 69 were injured in work zones in 2004.\*

Crashes in work zones are causing too many deaths and injuries of Missouri workers who are simply doing their job trying to make our roads better and safer. There is no excuse for not slowing down in construction work zones that are clearly marked, many times miles in advance. That is why we must make a concentrated effort to get drivers to slow down.

### **Making Missouri's Intersections Safer**

According to the Missouri Highway Patrol, more than 14,000 failure-to-yield accidents occur every year in Missouri. Of those accidents, one out of three result in death. The third segment of the bill, known as Clutch's Law, is an important step in reducing auto accidents and making Missouri's roads safer for our families and loved ones.

Currently, drivers who fail to yield and injure or kill only have to complete 25 hours of community service, and pay a \$25 fine and court costs. This bill stiffens the penalty by allowing a 30-day license suspension and additional fines of up to \$200, which will go to the Head Injury Fund. Clutch's Law will encourage Missourians to drive safely and yield the right-of-way, hopefully resulting in fewer injuries and deaths on Missouri's roads.

We look forward to debating SB 872 on the Senate Floor in the upcoming weeks.

### **Remembering Our Brave Highway Workers**

The Senate already passed another measure, Senate Concurrent Resolution 22, sponsored by Sen. Norma Champion, R-Springfield, that directs the Missouri Department of Transportation to create individual highway signs encouraging drivers to move over. The resolution also requests that these signs display the name and date of highway workers, emergency workers and highway patrol officers injured or killed on Missouri highways. The signs would then be placed at the locations the injuries or deaths occurred, per the approval of family members.

Signs in place where these tragedies happened will serve as a sobering reminder of what happens when motorists do not drive with the utmost care and caution.

*\*Information supplied by the Missouri Department of Transportation*