



Gibbons Capitol Report
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Goals for the New Year

The next legislative session will not begin until Jan. 3, but as of December 1, lawmakers can begin pre-filing legislation they hope to pass in the upcoming session. In the Senate, we will continue our work to create a new healthcare delivery system to replace Medicaid that is better for our vulnerable people. We will also work to reform the mental health system to protect the safety of people with disabilities. We will also work to update our out-of-date tax structure to lower the burden on taxpayers while meeting the needs of a 21st Century economy. But besides these goals of broad sweeping reform, I have pre-file three other bills that I will work to pass this coming session.

Protecting Our Children

Last session, we passed a strong bill that is now law that locks the door and throws away the key on anyone who would sexually abuse our children. There were also key provisions to help law enforcement identify predators trying to seduce our kids online. But unfortunately, I don't believe we took enough steps to prevent from keeping our children out of harms way. My plan, Senate Bill 1, helps identify sex offenders in our communities and prevents them from getting near our children. It requires that any state employee that works directly with children more than 50 percent of the time must have a criminal background check. We must also do a more effective job with mandatory background checks for all employees that work directly with children and ensure a consequence for those employers who fail to make this modest effort.

Protecting our Health Records

I am a big advocate of giving you, the consumer, a better ability to make choices in your healthcare. One of the first steps to getting patients off what I call the "healthcare conveyor belt" is by using technology. Last year, we devoted \$25 million to help Medicaid providers switch over to electronic medical records because paper kills. The Institute of Medicine reports up to 98,000 people die each year because of errors in paper medical records. Instant-time, personalized records help saves lives and money. But I want to make sure that your electronic medical records and e-prescriptions are protected. Senate Bill 2 creates severe penalties for anyone who would try to hack into your personal medical records.

Protecting People with Disabilities and Mental Illness

A series of articles published earlier this year shone light on an alarming number of deaths and injuries due to abuse and neglect in our state's public and private mental health care facilities. Both the governor's mental health task force and the Mental Health Commission recently released reports with recommendations on how to end these types of tragedies. Senate Bill 3 draws from their recommendations as well as discussions I had with clients and their families while touring several facilities over the summer. First, it would make public the final reports of investigations of abuse and neglect. While protecting the identity of the clients and staff involved, it allows all Missourians to know the full story. Plus, all deaths would be reviewed. It also increases the penalty for anyone who works in a position that makes them a "mandated reporter" by law that doesn't report cases of abuse and neglect. It also puts sanctions and penalties on providers that prevent or discourage reporting of abuse and neglect. It also stiffens the penalties for community providers who don't correct problems cited in their facilities, but upping the daily fine from \$100 to \$10,000. A client's safety is the top priority, especially for those who cannot care of themselves. That is why the measure creates a new crime of "vulnerable person abuse" and provides for mandatory reporting of suspected vulnerable person abuse.

As you can see, each of these smaller pieces of legislation will hopefully be encompassed in our overall reform goals for 2007. As we gear up for the upcoming session, I want to remind you that my door is always open. These bills are the first draft of ways to help protect our children, our medical privacy, and our most vulnerable citizens. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have ideas on how we can build upon these proposed bills in the new year.