



# Alter's Angle

A LEGISLATIVE UPDATE  
FROM SEN. BILL ALTER



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Week of Jan. 23, 2006

## Areas of Missouri Law Deserving Attention

*Protecting Children from Predators, Improving Emissions Testing*

State lawmakers this year have proposed many pieces of legislation aiming to prevent a parent's worst nightmare from ever happening in Missouri. In 2005, a 9-year-old Florida girl named Jessica Lunsford was abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered. Her killer was a registered sex offender, but police had lost track of him weeks before the abduction and assault occurred. In response, Florida lawmakers passed the Jessica Lunsford Act, which requires certain sex offenders to serve at least 25 years, and when they are released, they are tracked via global positioning satellites (GPS). Jessica's Law enables Florida authorities to know when a sex offender is someplace he shouldn't be, such as near a school, and it will also enable law enforcement to locate suspects if a child is abducted.

There has been a strong movement in Missouri to mirror Florida's laws in the name of protecting our children. Last year, we passed a law allowing chief county law enforcement officers to post photographs of sex offenders on their Web sites. Because sex offenders are known to be repeat offenders, pictures are one of the best ways to identify these potentially dangerous people and prevent them from getting close to our children.

This year we are making the laws even tougher. One of my bills this week was heard in the Senate Judiciary and Civil & Criminal Jurisprudence Committee, of which I am a member. Senate Bill 753 prohibits sexual offenders from entering school property without permission from the school's principal or head administrator if the victim of the offender's crime was less than 17 years of age at the time of the offense. By decreasing potential predators' access to their prey, we can protect our children from harm.

Numerous other measures strengthening the laws against sexual predators have also been heard in committee in the past two weeks. In the upcoming committee meetings, I expect that we will combine the legislation into an omnibus bill. Two of our most significant goals are to require that certain first-time sex offenders be electronically monitored for life and increase sentences for those who commit forcible rape, first-degree rape and forcible sodomy to a minimum of 25 years.

We will also consider calling for the Missouri Highway Patrol to operate a toll-free telephone number to disseminate information regarding individuals registered as sex offenders, and giving probation officers access to sex offenders' computers to prevent them from accessing child pornography. Other changes to the law that we will look into are prohibiting sexual offenders from being employed by the state, and holding civilly liable any employers who hire sex offenders who commit an offense through their employment. I will also be introducing a bill requiring sex offenders to annually update their photographs on file when they report in person to verify their information, and strengthening the registration requirements for all sexual offenders.

Through the collective efforts of lawmakers, we will do what we can to ensure that these heinous acts of sexual abuse are severely punished, if not prevented.

I also serve on the Senate Transportation Committee, which this week heard a bill I am co-sponsoring with Sen. John Griesheimer, R-Washington. Senate Bill 583 will make emissions regulations in the St. Louis metropolitan and Jefferson County area more consumer-friendly. A year ago, Elliot Davis from Channel 2 Fox News in St. Louis did an exposé investigating the efficacy of the emission-testing process and its cost to consumers and taxpayers. It was concluded that the system was more of a hassle than it was worth. Because Sen. Griesheimer and I agree, Mr. Davis is doing a follow-up story on our legislative proposal.

Right now motor vehicle owners must go to a state-funded testing station for the emissions test and go to another service station for the vehicle inspection. That is such an inconvenience and costs too much time and money, for consumers and other taxpayers. We are proposing to allow qualified safety inspectors and other motor vehicle repair workers to perform emissions tests. We also want to consider specific exemptions from the process so the people of Missouri get their time's and money's worth.

Feel free to contact me any time to express your thoughts or concerns so that I may most effectively represent you in the Missouri Senate.

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*Sen. Alter represents northern Jefferson County.*