



Alter's Angle

A LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
FROM SEN. BILL ALTER



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Improvements in the Name of Missouri Children

The collective efforts of state lawmakers have made it clear that the Show-Me State will show no tolerance for sexual predators. Provisions from 12 Senate bills sharing the common goal of strengthening the laws against those who prey on the innocent were this week combined into an omnibus measure in the Senate Judiciary and Civil & Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. I have the honor of serving on this committee and introduced two bills that were a part of the negotiated final result.

One of the main provisions of Senate Bill 588 requires that people who are convicted of rape, sodomy, first-degree statutory rape or first-degree sodomy be electronically monitored for life. We are also moving to increase minimum sentences to 30 years to life without parole eligibility for repeat offenders of those crimes. Under the legislation, most forcible rape and forcible sodomy offenses would be sentenced to prison for life, without parole eligibility for 25 years.

Because the technology era has enabled sexual offenders to use computers for luring in children, the measure specifies that the crime of sexual misconduct with a child can be committed via the Internet. Also, current Missouri law identifies that only teachers can be charged with the crime of sexual contact with a student. SB 588 expands the crime to include acts committed by student teachers, school employees or volunteers, or workers hired by an entity contracted to work with the school. In addition, we will be bringing our definition of child pornography in line with that of federal law.

The bill includes a number of provisions that deal with making the public aware of the dangerous sexual offenders. For one, the Highway Patrol would operate a toll-free number to help disseminate information regarding sex offenders to the public. Among its other specifications, the legislation also modifies the types of crimes that are posted on the registry, allows law enforcement to publish sex offender information in newspapers and requires sex offenders to provide an updated photo to law enforcement every five years. This comprehensive piece of legislation will help prevent child sex crimes and ensure that those who do target the young will get what they deserve.

I introduced this week another bill that is on board with promoting the safety of our children. SB 1019 modifies the Amber Alert System to heighten its effectiveness in bringing abducted children home. The Amber Alert System was created 10 years ago in response to a 9-year-old girl, Amber Hagerman, whose simple bike ride in Arlington, Tex., turned into a complex and heart-wrenching tragedy when she was kidnapped and later murdered. Her community united with the area radio stations in the Dallas area and started a broadcast-alert system to prevent this from happening again. The innovative efforts took hold across the nation, and today, the early warning system has been proven valuable in helping authorities find those who are abducted.

Currently in Missouri, Amber Alerts are issued by law enforcement when someone is kidnapped. Although it is sad when any person of any age is missing, children are more defenseless, and their cases deserve as much attention as possible to bring them back home. My proposed legislation states that the Amber Alert would be specifically for identifying and locating children of 17 years of age and younger, rather than adults. To maintain the level of increased awareness that is necessary for the Amber Alert to be successful, we should devote the system to the most sensitive abductions—when children are involved.

Another bill of mine was heard in committee this week. SB 850 expands the definition of “employee” in the description of county employee’s retirement fund. This measure would affect six counties in Missouri, including Jefferson County. Some county juvenile court employees are technically state employees, but because the county cuts their checks, they are not eligible for either Missouri’s state employee retirement system or the county’s program. My legislation changes the language so that these juvenile court employees will be covered by the county’s retirement fund, because they deserve the benefits of retirement just as every other hardworking county employee does.

The progress of the aforementioned initiatives will be relayed in future reports. In the meantime, feel free to contact me 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.