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Sens. Bartle and Callahan Introduce Legislation to Protect Access to Sports Coverage

JEFFERSON CITY – Sens. Matt Bartle, R-Lee’s Summit, and Victor Callahan, D-Independence, today introduced legislation prohibiting Missouri sports teams that utilize public funds from prohibiting members of the media from covering their games from the sidelines.

“Stadiums that are financed with taxpayer dollars should not be off limits to the media outlets on which the public relies,” Bartle said. “When teams trying to increase their bottom line try to keep local media out of the stadium, they are keeping us all out.”

Under Senate Bill 452, any team that owns, operates or leases a stadium that has been partially funded with taxes cannot prohibit coverage of their games. Members of the media who are denied access may file for damages in the local circuit court. Similar legislation has been introduced in the Michigan Legislature.

“Every legitimate member of the print and broadcast media should have access to the sidelines,” Callahan said. “Tax dollars should not be used for businesses trying to exert a monopoly on coverage.”

Recently enacted National Football League (NFL) policy prohibits local television stations from shooting their own video from the sidelines during NFL games. Under the plan, stations must take a network pool feed for use in their news programs.

The NFL says it is trying protect ownership rights of game content. However, high-profile groups such as the National Association of Broadcasters and Society of Professional Journalists oppose the rule change as a subversion of the First Amendment right of a free press.

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