



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319, Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Lawmakers Combat Health-care Fraud and Internet Predators

The 2007 legislative session, which began this week, offers lawmakers the opportunity to continue strengthening state laws for the benefit of Missourians. Health care and public safety will again be important topics for the Legislature. Lawmakers this year will continue efforts to reduce Medicaid provider fraud and improve privacy protection of health-care information.

Lawmakers again this year plan to take up legislation to reduce Medicaid fraud at the provider level. Last year, the Senate approved a measure enhancing penalties against health-care providers who commit Medicaid fraud and offering financial incentives to whistleblowers. Under the legislation, penalties for first-time and repeat offenders would have been increased, those who defraud Medicaid would be prohibited from participating in the system and offenders would have to serve at least 85 percent of their prison sentence.

Although the Legislature failed to ultimately pass this important provision last year, lawmakers are dedicated to reducing waste, fraud and abuse by Medicaid providers to stem the growth of the overburdened public health-care system.

The Legislature will also address the fraudulent distribution of personal health information. New Senate legislation creates the crime of knowingly receiving, selling, or obtaining personal health information without consent. This could include information on an individual's health, medical history, medical treatment or diagnosis by a health-care provider that is not otherwise publicly available. Exemptions are made for law enforcement officials, health-care providers and other authorized personnel.

This sort of personal information is extremely private and sensitive — the business of individuals and their doctors. Personal health information can be used to illicitly acquire prescription drugs and invade the privacy of individuals, and we should do all we can to keep these records in the right hands.

On a different note, I am pleased to see that the governor recently announced that a grant program designed to support investigations of cyber predators has been awarded more than \$242,000, some of which will be distributed right here in Eastern Jackson County. This grant was made possible by a provision in the comprehensive “Jessica’s Law” legislation that I handled in the Senate last year. This new law, which dramatically increases penalties for predators who sexually assault children, also authorizes the Department of Public Safety to create the Internet Cyber Crime Grant program to assist law enforcement officials in investigating dangerous Internet crimes, especially sex crimes against children. Those receiving funding include the Lee’s Summit ICCG/Internet and Cyber Crime Detective, which received \$20,288.49, and Independence Against Internet Crime, which received \$12,685.71. These funds are essential to making the Internet safer for our children.

If you have comments or questions about any matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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