



# SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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

**Column for Week of:**  
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## **Judiciary Committee Takes Up Child-Protection Legislation**

As the 2007 session has moved past procedural matters and the introduction of new legislation, lawmakers are getting down to work in the committees they've been assigned. I am fortunate to again serve as chairman of the Senate Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. The judiciary committee handles a wide variety of bills concerning criminal and civil law, and this year it will address some of the most pressing issues facing the Legislature, such as child-pornography laws and the state sex offender registry.

There are eight members of the Senate judiciary committee, and during the course of the year we have our work cut out for us with the sheer number of bills assigned for the committee to review. In fact, it will be assigned more bills than any other Senate committee. All citizens are welcome to come to public hearings and testify on any bill before the legislative panel. To view the committee's hearing schedule and a list of bills being considered, visit [www.senate.mo.gov/07info/comm/judi.htm](http://www.senate.mo.gov/07info/comm/judi.htm).

Updating Missouri's child pornography laws is one major concern of senators on the committee. Already this year, we have heard troubling testimony on the continued presence of child porn in Missouri. Law enforcement officials estimate that more than 50,000 computers in Missouri have child porn on their hard drives, and we have heard disturbing testimony on how some of our weakest and most vulnerable citizens are being abused.

Legislation heard by the judiciary committee will enhance civil and criminal penalties against those who possess or promote child porn, and the governor is proposing doubling funding for a program that helps law enforcers catch cyber predators. I will work hard to see that Missouri's penalties against child predators are strong enough to send a message that this aberrant behavior will not be tolerated.

Next week, the judiciary committee will hear testimony on a resolution I am co-sponsoring to correct a legal loophole affecting the state sex offender registry. Senate Joint Resolution 9 upholds the original intent of Megan's Law, which requires Missouri sex offenders to register with their local sheriff's departments. Due to conflicting language in the Missouri Constitution, the Missouri Supreme Court this past summer ruled that sex offenders convicted before Megan's Law was established in 1995 do not have to register. The ruling takes a large number of offenders off the state registry and undermines the spirit of a measure passed to protect our children. Once passed by the Legislature and approved by voters, SJR 9 allows Megan's Law to be applied retroactively.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other 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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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