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New Bill Challenges NFL Monopoly on Coverage

Millions of people across the United States enjoy watching the National Football League (NFL), and I am one of them. The league enjoys a good reputation for its talented players, team parity and exciting games. However, the NFL and its teams have taken steps that threaten to alienate fans and league supporters. New NFL rules abuse the rights of the free press in publicly funded stadiums, and I fear the guidelines could lead to tighter restrictions that ultimately limit viewership. In response, this week I filed legislation prohibiting NFL teams from barring local media from the sidelines in stadiums that are built with substantial amounts of taxpayer dollars.

Recently enacted 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 highlight feed for use in their news programs.

The NFL must realize that taxpayers put a lot of money into these professional stadiums, and they depend on local media for coverage. Access to games should not be limited by league rules. Eventually, I fear, the NFL will take the path of championship boxing, which uses the pay-per-view system.

Under bipartisan legislation I am co-sponsoring with Sen. Victor Callahan, D-Independence, any Missouri team that owns, operates or leases a stadium that has been partially funded with tax dollars cannot prohibit coverage of their games by local media. This is a common-sense measure and will help keep one of America's favorite pastimes freely available to all fans.

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 or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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