



# SENATOR YVONNE WILSON

**District 9 – Capitol Building, Room 330 Jefferson City, MO 65101**

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## Sen. Yvonne Wilson Pre-files Bill Targeting “Cyberbullying” in Schools

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JEFFERSON CITY - Sen. Yvonne Wilson, D-Kansas City, has pre-filed legislation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of the 94<sup>th</sup> Missouri General Assembly, which would require school districts to adopt an anti-bullying policy that includes cyberbullying and electronic communications. Senate Bill 762 states that “each district's anti-bullying policy shall be founded on the assumption that all students need a safe learning environment.” Bullying, as defined in the legislation, means “intimidation or harassment that causes a reasonable student to fear for his or her physical safety or property. Bullying may consist of physical actions, including gestures, or oral, cyberbullying, electronic, or written communication, and any threat of retaliation for reporting of such acts.”

“As a veteran educator in the Kansas City School District, my top concern was always for the welfare and safety of my students,” Sen. Wilson said. “I have tried to get similar legislation passed in previous sessions, and I think it’s unfortunate that it took a tragedy on the other side of the state to get people to see the importance of this issue.”

In October 2006, 13-year old Megan Meier of Dardenne Prairie committed suicide after a boy she had been communicating with online began sending her cruel messages. The “boy” Megan thought she was corresponding with on MySpace was a fiction created by a neighbor’s mother, her 18-year old employee and 13-year old daughter. The story was first reported in a suburban St. Louis newspaper last month and soon drew international attention.

In response, the governor has created an Internet Harassment Task Force to review state laws regarding stalking, harassment and child endangerment, he has proposed an increase in

funding for the Multi-jurisdictional Cyber Crimes Task Force, and several state lawmakers have pre-filed bills which crackdown on Internet harassment.

Additionally, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Missouri Department of Mental Health are working together on a program to assist Missouri's schools in addressing teen suicide. Missouri Well Aware is a quarterly bulletin sent to superintendents, principals, counselors and teachers which provides information about preventing teen suicide and tips to identify youths at risk for suicide.

"I've have seen firsthand the pernicious effects of bullying at schools," Sen. Wilson said. "Students cannot learn when they are afraid of their peers or afraid to go to school. Too often, bullying in school is dismissed as a phase kids will grow out of, or even as a right of passage. But the trauma of being victimized by a school bully can haunt a person for the rest of their lives, or result in a tragedy."

According to the 2006 Missouri Student Survey, suicide is the third-leading cause of death among Missouri youths, ages 10 to 24. The report found 14-percent of Missouri high school students said they had thought about committing suicide in the past year.

Senate Bill 762 requires school district employees to report any instance of bullying of which the employee has firsthand knowledge. Each school district also will be required to train its employees in accordance with district policy regarding bullying and cyberbullying.

Sen. Wilson dealt with similar issues as a member of the Missouri House Committee on Crime Prevention and Public Safety. As a state senator, she has filed legislation in 2006 (SB 674), 2007 (SB 646) and 2008 (SB 762) prohibiting school employees, volunteers or students from bullying a student while on school property. The 2007 and 2008 bills were modified to include cyberbullying and electronic communications.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of the 94<sup>th</sup> Missouri General Assembly convenes January 9, 2008.

*Senator Wilson represents Kansas Citizens in the Missouri Senate.*