



*Nothing is politically right  
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE  
JEFFERSON CITY

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is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Mental Health Reform Bill Sent to Governor**

### ***Reporting and Compliance to Better Protect Vulnerable Missourians***

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JEFFERSON CITY –A Senate bill aimed at better protecting the safety and quality of life of Missouri’s most vulnerable citizens served by both private and state-run care centers received final approval from the General Assembly and now heads to the governor. The comprehensive mental health reform bill will review all suspicious deaths, publish reports of abuse and neglect, and creates the crime of vulnerable person abuse. The bill’s sponsor, Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, said the measure is a comprehensive mental health reform bill that draws from both the governor’s mental health task force and the Mental Health Commission’s report recommendations on how to end tragedies in the mental health system. Gibbons said a series of articles published last year shined light on an alarming number of deaths and injuries caused by abuse and neglect in both state-run and private care facilities.

“We must reform our state's mental health system,” he said. “In doing so, we will better protect our most vulnerable citizens’ safety and quality of life.”

The measure, Senate Bill 3, would make public the final reports of investigations of abuse and neglect. All suspicious deaths would be reviewed. Gibbons said the identities of clients and staff involved in investigations would be protected, but Missourians deserve to know the full story of abuse and neglect cases so they can make informed decisions when choosing the best care for their family members.

The measure also stiffens the penalties for community providers who don’t correct problems cited in their facilities by upping the daily fine from \$100 to \$10,000.

Gibbons said the bill also focuses on strengthening the reporting requirements for abuse.

“A client’s safety is the top priority, especially for those who cannot care for themselves,” Gibbons said. “That is why the measure creates a new crime of "vulnerable person abuse" and provides for mandatory reporting of suspected vulnerable person abuse.”

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SB 3 also increases the penalty for anyone who works in a position that makes them a “mandated reporter” by law that doesn’t report cases of abuse and neglect. It also places sanctions and penalties on providers that prevent or discourage reporting of abuse and neglect.

Language to require group home facilities to have fire safety alarm and sprinkler systems passed in House Bills 952 & 674. Gibbons was supportive of the sprinkler requirement although the House removed it from the final version of Senate Bill 3.

The Senate handler of the sprinkler bill, Sen. Jack Goodman, R-Mt. Vernon, said the horrible fire that took the lives of 11 people at a privately run group home in Anderson last year is the catalyst for the change.

“The Anderson Guest House fire was an unthinkable tragedy that brought a need for heightened safety measures to our attention,” Goodman said. “I appreciate Sen. Gibbons, our chamber’s leader, working with me to champion this cause and help protect vulnerable Missourians from now on.”

Before, Missouri law only required sprinkler systems in higher care facilities such as skilled nursing centers and intermediate care facilities as well as residential care facilities built after 2000. House Bills 952 & 674 requires care facilities to have working sprinkler systems and fire alarms by December 31, 2012.

Both bills now advance to the governor’s desk where they await his signature to become law.

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