



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Better Pay for Deputies

JEFFERSON CITY – I bet most folks would have a hard time believing that the deputy sheriff who responds to a traffic accident or a domestic violence call earns less than the typical worker at McDonalds. Sheriff departments across Missouri have been losing deputies because of low wages, and it is past time the legislature tried to do something to improve the situation.

The Senate Interim Committee on Funding for County Sheriff Offices met at the Capitol during the annual Veto Session. I was glad to be named to this committee because I know that law enforcement is usually the top budget item for county governments, especially in rural counties. Our committee is looking at the ways counties pay for law enforcement – mostly court costs and other fees, reviewing the pay rates for deputy sheriffs across the state, and comparing the rate of pay for deputies across Missouri and in neighboring states.

For too long, counties have been losing deputy sheriffs to the Highway Patrol and other law enforcement agencies that offer better pay and benefits. In fact, deputies in 91 of 114 Missouri counties actually qualify for state assistance, including the MC+ assistance program for children. Deputies in 35 counties currently receive state assistance. One Missouri Sheriff in northwest Missouri earns an annual salary of \$20,800, less than most beginning teachers make in the state.

Most deputies start out at \$10/hour, while MoDOT pays a truck driver \$12/hour, but no one is asking that truck driver to save a life or, heaven forbid, to take a life.

Fortunately, lawmakers are working in a bipartisan fashion to address this issue. The chairman of the Interim Committee, Republican Senator John Griesheimer, said during our hearing last week that failure is not an option, and I agree completely.

There seemed to be agreement during our committee hearing that increasing service fees is one answer to this problem. It would only take about \$8.5-million to solve the salary crisis. Meantime, lawmakers are giving \$95-million over ten years to redevelop a quarter-mile section of St. Louis. That provision was included in the Quality Jobs bill passed by the legislature during the special session, and I would argue that sheriff deputies deserve quality jobs too. We must ensure that the people who keep us safe have the resources they need to do their job.

We also need to ensure an equitable distribution of whatever funds are available so pay scales for deputies are similar across the state.

I am working to get the Interim Committee on Funding for County Sheriff Offices into the district to talk to law enforcement officials in northeast Missouri.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about this or any other issue. Please feel free to call me at 573-751-7852, or email me at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov.