



Senate Makes Child Protections A Major Priority

JEFFERSON CITY — The Senate gave final approval recently to an omnibus sex crimes bill that provides more buffers and protections for kids from sexual predators. Senate Bill 714 expands information in the state’s sex offender registry, strengthens the severity of charges for sex crimes and attempted sex crimes against children, and targets more dollars to the state’s highly successful Internet Cyber Crimes Grant (ICCG) Program. The bill is in the House for similar consideration.

The sex crimes bill contains a number of thoughtfully crafted provisions — all designed to reaffirm our state’s stalwart commitment to providing maximum protections for our children from sexual predators. Under the proposed legislation, more online identifying information of any registered sex offenders and the names of juveniles found guilty of certain sexual crimes would be added to the sex offender registry.

The proposed changes will also require any person whose name is on a sex offender registry in another state who attends public or private school in Missouri for more than seven days to provide information to the registry. The law also adds the crime of conspiring to commit certain sexual offenses to the list of crimes for which a person must register.

The wide-ranging bill also shortens the amount of time convicted sex offenders have to register with law enforcement officials, bans sex offenders from participating in all Halloween festivities related to children, and expands the list of violators who must stay at least 500 feet away from schools or child-care facilities to offenders registered in other states, countries and jurisdictions.

Another major component of the bill increases the penalty for attempted sexual misconduct with a child to a Class D felony — the same penalty for committing such an act. Similarly, anyone who attempts to provide pornographic materials to a minor would be charged with the same penalty (a Class A misdemeanor) as those who actually furnish the materials. The penalty still applies if the “minor” is a police officer masquerading as a minor. Stronger penalties are also included for possession of child pornography. The new measures also increase the penalty for failing to register as a sex offender.

Just as importantly, the proposed changes to law would overturn a state Court of Appeals decision that allows defendants and attorneys involved in child pornography cases to retrieve evidence following court cases. This would require them to view evidence at approved state or governmental facilities and prevent redistribution of the pornographic images.

In addition, the legislation creates the Cyber Crimes Investigation fund. The new fund would provide \$3 million per year for the existing ICCG grant program, a very successful venture that provides funding for local law enforcement and multi-jurisdictional task forces to hire cyber detectives and computer forensic personnel to go after Internet predators and child pornographers.

Since the ICCG program began, arrests of cyber predators quadrupled from 2006 to 2007, from 26 to 105 cases. Many law enforcement personnel have reported that armed with the proper funds, going after cyber predators is like “shooting fish in a barrel.”

We want to keep Missouri as one of the safest places for kids to live and one of the worst places for sexual offenders to reside in or visit. These measures will strengthen our law enforcement officials’ ability to identify, track and prosecute people who purposely seek to sexually exploit children. That’s one of the state Senate’s top priorities this year and one I wholeheartedly support. I hope the Missouri House will agree that our kids are worth it and pass these crucial measures.

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 phone at (866) 271-2844.

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