

Senator Scott T.
Rupp



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MISSOURI SENATE

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Sen. Rupp's Cyber Stalking Measure Signed into Law New Law Protects From Online Harassment and Stalking

JEFFERSON CITY — The governor today signed a bill that provides additional protections for Missouri children and adults from being harassed or stalked over the Internet or through other means of electronic communication. [Senate Bill 818](#), sponsored by Sen. Scott T. Rupp, R-Wentzville, was inspired by the case of Dardenne Prairie teenager Megan Meier, whose suicide in 2006 may have been influenced by a case of cyber harassment.

Rupp's legislation expands the definition of current stalking and harassment laws to include cyber-related communications as well as increases the penalties for related crimes.

"The governor signing SB 818 into law sends a message to those who might engage in this sort of activity that it will not be tolerated in Missouri," Sen. Rupp said. "Today we have a law on the books that allows local prosecutors to go after people who pursue, harass or contact others in an unsolicited manner. We're committed to protecting Missourians from harassment by any means."

The new measure upgrades the charge of harassment from a Class A misdemeanor to a Class D felony, when the perpetrator is 21 years old or older and the victim is 17 years old or younger. Class D offenses are punishable by up to four years in prison with accompanying fines. Repeat harassment offenders, regardless of ages involved, will also be charged with a Class D felony. Prior to this measure, repeat offenders could only be charged with a Class A misdemeanor.

"Toughening the penalties for harassment and stalking will help deter this type of activity," Sen. Rupp said. "It sends a message that we are taking this crime seriously and that offenders will be punished accordingly."

The legislation also provides for elevating the penalties for second offenses of stalking and aggravated stalking from misdemeanor to felonies regardless of when the first offense was committed. Previously, the felony charge applied only when the second offense was committed within five years of the first offense. In addition, the new measure requires school boards to add Internet stalking to the list of crimes they must report.

The governor's signature allows SB 818 to take effect on August 28, 2008.

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