



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Fighting Sexual Predators in Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY — One of the most special qualities in a child is the ability to trust without question. Sadly, we live in a world where people sometimes take advantage of such unwavering trust. As parents we now find it necessary to protect our kids from the threat of sexual predators and others who seek to harm those who are vulnerable.

This week the Senate Judiciary Committee discussed Senate Bill 818, a piece of legislation that would essentially make it a crime to harass or stalk someone on the Internet. This bill stems from the case of 13-year-old Megan Meier, a Missouri teen who committed suicide after her adult neighbor, pretending to be a 16-year-old boy, began to verbally abuse her. Police have not been able to prosecute the adult because cyberbullying is not technically a crime in Missouri. Megan's mother, Tina, came to the hearing to voice her support for the legislation.

Next week in the Judiciary Committee, we will hear several bills related to sexual predators. Two of the bills, Senate Bill 714 and Senate Bill 933, address the issue of child pornography and create stricter provisions for fighting the promotion and possession of pornographic materials involving children and minors. The exploitation of children is far too common in Missouri and the people who take advantage of the defenseless should be punished accordingly. We cannot let loopholes in our current law stand in the way of justice being served to people who don't have any respect for the sanctity of a child's innocence.

We will also discuss two bills, Senate Joint Resolutions 30 and 34, which require sexual offenders to register with the state, even if they were convicted before the registry laws took effect. These bills would close a gap in the current law while making sure that every sex offender in the state of Missouri is placed on a registry list, better protecting our neighborhoods.

The connecting themes in these bills remind me of two years ago when the Senate Judiciary Committee passed Missouri's version of Jessica's Law. As chair of the committee, I felt a responsibility to get this important legislation to the Senate floor as soon as possible.

When Jessica's Law was signed by the governor in June 2006, I knew that we had taken great strides to making Missouri a little safer for our children. I hope to continue the work that we've accomplished since the signing of Jessica's Law.

The bills I've mentioned in this column will be voted on by the Judiciary Committee and if they pass, will move on the Senate calendar for possible future debate by the full Senate. If you have any 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 e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.