



# SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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Column for Week of:  
May 26, 2008

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## Ensuring the Safety of Our Children

The Bill of Rights of the Missouri Constitution states the following:

That all constitutional government is intended to promote the general welfare of the people; that all persons have a natural right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and the enjoyment of the gains of their own industry; that all persons are created equal and are entitled to equal rights and opportunity under the law; that to give security to these things is the principal office of government, and that when government does not confer this security, it fails in its chief design.

One of the core duties of government is to create an orderly society where even the weakest among us are given equal opportunities and are protected. We have no citizens more vulnerable than our children. This year we made protecting Missouri's children one of our top priorities in the General Assembly with the passage of several pieces of legislation that will help keep our kids safe from sexual predators, online harassment and exploitation.

We placed tougher restrictions on convicted sex offenders through [SB 714](#), first by expanding and improving the state's sex offender registry database, which was originally established through legislation I sponsored in 2003. Now sex offenders must provide county law enforcement with any online identifying information they use, such as an e-mail account. This information will be made available to the public through the sex offender registry Web site (you can link to this website by visiting my homepage at [www.senate.mo.gov/bartle](http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle)).

Another key component of the bill tackles child pornography. Exploiting a child is one of the vilest acts imaginable. By eliminating the possibility of probation or parole for at least three years for anyone who pleads guilty or is convicted of promoting child pornography in the first degree, we are strengthening the punishment for those who take advantage of a child's innocence.

Cyberspace can be a dangerous place for a child. The Legislature just passed two new laws that will better protect kids when they go online. First, [SB 932](#) creates the Cyber Crimes Investigation Fund that will provide \$3 million per year for the existing Internet Cyber Crime Grant (ICCG) program, which targets Internet predators and pornographers who attempt to lure and sexually exploit children.

Another measure, [SB 818](#), expands the definitions of harassment and stalking to include communication by any means — including online communication. The bill has been coined "Megan's Law," named for Megan Meier, the Missouri teenager who may have been led to commit suicide in 2006

after being harassed online by a neighbor. Megan's Law also strengthens the penalties for harassment and stalking and requires school boards to add Internet stalking to the list of crimes they must report.

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](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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