



Gibbons Capitol Report
April 11, 2008

Protecting Rape Victims

We adopted better protections for rape victims this week in the Missouri Senate. I sponsored a measure that builds on the protections we put into law last year to make victims of sexual and domestic assault feel more comfortable to come forward to seek justice. This year's measure streamlines Missouri's system to pay for the cost of the collection of sexual assault evidence, freeing up money to improve crisis services offered by rape crisis centers throughout Missouri.

Righting a Wrong

Before last year, the women who fall prey to these horrible crimes were further victimized by having to pay expensive medical bills associated with collecting the evidence needed to prosecute their case. We would be appalled if our home was broken into and the police charged us for dusting for fingerprints. That's exactly what we were doing to rape victims and it had to stop. That's why we made sure women no longer are forced to pay for the cost of the collection of sexual assault evidence. Victims can also reclaim "out-of-pocket" costs from the Crime Victims Compensation fund for items seized during the collection of evidence.

Paying for Rape Kits

We wanted to build on the new protections we put in place last year for crime victims because too many mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and friends are harmed. In 2006, 1,753 rapes were reported in Missouri. The 2007 measure, House Bill 583, required the Department of Health and Senior Services to make payments to medical providers to cover the charges of forensic examinations for victims of sexual offenses. This year's bill authorizes in statute the move of that fund to the Department of Public Safety and also streamlines the process of reimbursing hospitals and medical providers for their costs, rather than what they charge. The new program also draws down federal STOP (Violence Against Women) grant money to help cover the evidence collection. Since its inception, we've paid more than \$1.25 million for forensic exams.

Savings Mean More Support

With the cost-savings associated with streamlining the program and drawing down federal grants, we're able to make more resources available for the crisis services victims

need. We can now invest more in rape crisis centers, making sure trained medical providers collect the evidence and counselors are readily available to support victims.

Last year we passed protections for crime victims to make sure they feel comfortable to come forward and seek justice because advocates estimated that an alarming nine out of ten rapes go unreported. We made real changes to make sure our criminal justice system no longer adds insult to injury for these victims. Now we want to build on those protections by making sure we have a stable system for paying for sexual assault evidence collection that saves money so victims will have more resources to help them.