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that is morally wrong.*

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JEFFERSON CITY

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State Lawmakers Give Full Support to Cyber Stalking Law ***Sen. Rupp's Bill Expands Definitions & Increases Penalties***

JEFFERSON CITY — The General Assembly passed legislation today that will provides additional protections for Missouri children and adults from being harassed or stalked over the Internet or through other communication devices. [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 stalking and harassment laws to include cyber-related communications and increases the penalties for related crimes.

"Missouri is committed to protecting our citizens in every way possible from this kind of senseless activity by punishing those who engage in it," he said. "We want to make it very clear that people who pursue, harass or contact people in these unsolicited ways are going pay for it."

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.

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.

Senate leader Mike Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, supported Rupp in his effort to create this law to make sure future crimes of this nature could be punished.

"In Megan's case, local prosecutors did not have a law on the books that defined the crime that took place," he said. "We've now given local prosecutors the tool to be able to go after those who would harass, stalk or intimidate our children online."

A California indictment in the Megan Meier case came down yesterday. To learn more about the bill, visit www.senate.mo.gov and do a key word search for "SB818."

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