



SENATOR SCOTT T. RUPP

**DISTRICT 2
REPUBLICAN**

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Legislation Supports Missouri Crime Victims

The General Assembly this year passed a bill that I sponsored ([SB 338](#)) that authorizes in statute some positive changes that are already occurring in Missouri to provide better protections for rape victims and enacts new protections for crime victims.

The proposed legislation, which awaits the governor's signature, would permanently shift the Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) Program — a program developed in 1991 and following legislation passed in 2007 ensures sexual assault victims in our state never have to pay for the cost of the collection of rape kit evidence — from the Department of Health and Senior Services to the Department of Public Safety, where it makes more sense because of better tracking, statistical gathering, and faster payouts. The transfer was made following an executive order by then-governor Matt Blunt in 2008. My proposal also reflects the transfer of the Missouri Crime Victims' Compensation Fund from the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to the Department of Public Safety.

The SAFE Program, which is under the auspices of the Missouri Crime Victims' Compensation Program, pays for the rape kit and collection of evidence used in the prosecution of cases of women and children victimized by sexual offenses in Missouri.

Since July 1, 2008, the SAFE program has paid out more than \$1.6 million for sexual assault examinations, or a total of 2,269 claims, and according to Program Manager Susan Sudduth is continuing to provide a vital service for help crime victims get the physical evidence they need to prosecute their offenders if they choose to do so. The SAFE program is funded each year through approximately \$1 million in state general revenues and federal matching funds.

Similarly, the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund helps

crime victims by providing financial assistance to victims who have suffered physical harm as a result of violent crime, or, in the case of death, helps the victims' dependents. For victims who have exhausted other collateral sources, the program can help pay for medical costs, psychological counseling, funeral expenses and loss of support to a maximum limit of \$25,000. Since 1993, the fund has provided services to approximately 861,000 victims of crime in the state of Missouri and has paid more than \$93 million in victim compensation to Missouri crime victims and their families. For fiscal year 2010, the fund will receive approximately \$10.2 million.

Other provisions of SB 338 ensure the Department of Public Safety may receive gifts, such as memorial gifts, credited to the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund — which is funded primarily by fines, fees and judgments through the state's court system — and would grant a victim's request that a photograph be taken of an incarcerated individual prior to release and given to the crime victim. In addition, the legislation would allow the victims of certain serious crimes to be represented by counsel or a representative designated by the victim instead of appearing in person during an offender's parole and probation revocation hearings.

Victims that face the aftermath of a crime deserve these protections and I am pleased that Missouri is taking these steps to provide them.

If you have 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 phone at (866) 271-2844.

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