



MISSOURI SENATE

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For Immediate Release:
May 5, 2009

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General Assembly Approves Legislation Advanced by Sen. Jane Cunningham to Create ‘Child Witness Protection Act’ *HB 863 Would Enact Uniform Guidelines for Treatment of Child Witnesses in Missouri Courts*

JEFFERSON CITY — The General Assembly passed a bill today (5/5) advanced by Sen. Jane Cunningham, R-Chesterfield, that would expand protections for children testifying in Missouri courts. House Bill 863, handled by Sen. Cunningham in the Senate, would establish a uniform set of guidelines for the treatment of children 17 and younger testifying in Missouri courtrooms.

“The Child Witness Protection Act just makes sense for protecting these children from what has to be one of the most difficult things to do: facing a courtroom full of strangers,” Sen. Cunningham said. “These measures will work to facilitate fair and accurate testimony, minimize the trauma of testifying in court, and make sure children testifying in court are not harassed or intimidated.”

The proposed guidelines included in HB 863 include:

- Requiring the court to administer the oath to children in an age-appropriate manner;
- Allowing a child to testify during a time of day when the child is best able to understand the questions and to limited the duration of testimony;
- Permitting a child witness to have a comfort item, such as a toy, blanket or similar item;
- Allowing the presence of a support person who must abide by rules established by the court;
- Making accommodations in the courtroom for a child witness, such as adjusting the courtroom layout, conducting the proceedings outside of a courtroom, or relaxing the formalities of the proceedings.

The bill now moves to the governor’s desk for signing into law.

For further information about Senator Jane Cunningham and her legislation, you may visit her Senate website at www.senate.mo.gov/cunningham or contact her Chief of Staff, Lucy LePage, at (573) 751-1186.

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