



Senator Matt Bartle – Serving Jackson County

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Crime Bill Passed by General Assembly

On the last day of session, lawmakers gave resounding approval to a comprehensive crime bill—the first of its kind in several years—and sent the legislation to the governor for signing into law. Because of the complicated nature of the judicial system, and the fact that it's much more difficult to reach a compromise on a wide-ranging measure, we haven't come close to passing an omnibus crime bill in some time.

[House Bill 62](#), which I handled in the Senate, contains several provisions that maintain the Show-Me State's commitment to being tough on crime while making many common sense changes to the law that will benefit Missourians.

One of the most important parts of the bill gives anyone who is threatened by a dog the right to act first—without fear of criminal or civil liability—to defend themselves or their family from an attack. There have been several violent dog attacks on innocent people in Eastern Jackson County, including a husband and wife who went out for a jog around their neighborhood in 2007 and were almost killed when they were attacked by a vicious bull mastiff. The husband acted to defend his wife from the dog—who tried to lunge for her neck—and they both ended up being severely injured before he was forced to kill the animal after a long struggle.

This legislation will help ensure that the law won't punish those who are just trying to defend themselves and others from vicious dogs. It also creates penalties for the owners of dogs that injure people. Owners should be responsible for their animals; if an owner chooses to let a dog run free, then it attacks someone and in the process is hurt or killed, the owner should be punished, not the victim.

Another portion of the bill takes steps to make Missouri's floating rivers more family-

friendly. Floating down one of Missouri's rivers was once a fun summer activity for people of all ages to enjoy, but in recent years, behavior on the part of some floaters has kept many families away. With this legislation, we are attempting to clean up the state's floating streams so that families can enjoy them this summer and in the summers to come.

People will no longer be able to have or use beer bongs or any other contraption designed for the rapid consumption of alcohol while on the rivers. Also, large volume alcohol containers, such as kegs, will be banned, as will certain types of Styrofoam coolers that often break apart and pollute our beautiful natural streams. Our rivers are public places that should be available to everyone—including those with children who want to have a wholesome family get-away.

And finally, another section of HB 62 targets cattle rustlers. While many people might assume cattle rustling only happened in the days of the Wild West, unfortunately, only the methods have changed. In one night, cattle thieves with a large livestock trailer can do serious damage to a rancher's livelihood. One gang of rustlers can steal tens of thousands of dollars worth of cattle and many are never caught because they unload and sell the cattle before they can be found. We are seeing cattle thefts happen with more frequency, and it's time we expand the crime of cattle rustling. The legislation requires any person who steals livestock worth more than \$3,000 and who has pleaded guilty to the same offense before to serve at least 80 percent of the sentence before being eligible for probation or parole.

These are just some of the many provisions that can be found in HB 62. I will talk about more of these measures in future columns. This bill represents a step forward and will help put criminals behind bars where they belong.

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

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