



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Supporting Those Who Protect Us

JEFFERSON CITY – During the 2008 legislative session, Missouri lawmakers approved a bill to supplement the salaries of our county sheriffs' deputies by assessing a \$10 fee on each subpoena, summons or other court order delivered by sheriff's offices. I co-sponsored Senate Bill 935, which created the Deputy Sheriff Salary Supplementation Fund. Similar language was included in House Bill 2224, which was the bill approved by the General Assembly and signed into law by the governor. The final Senate vote on the bill was 24-10 in favor.

This week a Cole County judge upheld the new law that helps our sheriffs' deputies earn a decent living. Officials in St. Louis and St. Charles counties had challenged the law as unconstitutional, but the judge disagreed. An appeal is expected, unfortunately.

After the 2007 session, I served on the Senate Interim Committee on Funding for County Sheriff Offices. Our committee visited Shelby County and heard stories of deputy sheriffs having to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. We learned that deputies in 91 of 114 counties make so little they qualify for public assistance like food stamps or federal housing. This new law is expected to generate \$4-6 million per year, boosting the salaries of sheriffs' deputies across Missouri to about \$28,000. Right now, those deputies earn just over \$22,000 per year, and many are forced to look for better paying jobs with the Highway Patrol or in another state.

We expect a lot from our sheriffs' deputies – working long hours, traveling many miles, putting their lives on the line for us – and we should compensate them fairly. I think this new law is a step in the right direction and I am glad to see the court agrees.

I also want to thank my former Senate colleague, Attorney General Chris Koster, for defending this law. As Prosecutor of Cass County, Koster helped lead that county from having one of the lowest pay scales for sheriffs' deputies to one of the highest. As a state Senator, Koster helped pass the 2007 bill that is now law.

I still believe these invaluable public servants are underpaid, even with this potential salary boost, so this is an issue we might have to revisit after the economy recovers.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.