



State Senator Scott T. Rupp ~ District 2

The Rupp Report

Serving Lincoln County & St. Charles County

Column For Week of: August 30, 2010

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Missouri Schools Address Serious Issue of Cyberbullying

A major issue was brought to light in our state back in 2006 after a 13-year old St. Charles County girl took her own life because of cyber harassment. Sadly, we can not change what happened to young Megan Meier, however, Missouri laws in place now will help protect those citizens who are victims of the vicious crime known as cyberbullying.

A measure passed by the General Assembly this year designed to address cyberbullying recently took effect Aug. 28. **House Bill 1543** contains several provisions relating to school safety, such as adding cyberbullying and electronic communications to school district anti-bullying policies; expanding the report of acts of violence to include all teachers at the students' school building; expanding employee immunity from following established discipline policies to include, but not be limited to, policies of student discipline; and allowing all public school districts to require a school uniform or restrict student dress.

And just two years ago, the Legislature approved and the governor signed **Senate Bill 818**, a bill I sponsored in the Missouri Senate that changed various provisions relating to stalking and harassment in our state. This bill expands stalking and harassment laws in Missouri to include Web-related communications and increases the penalties for such crimes. In addition, the legislation 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 how old they are, will also be charged with a Class D felony. Senate Bill 818 also requires school boards to add Internet stalking to the list of crimes they must report.

This issue took on nation-wide attention, prompting Megan Meier's mother, Tina Meier, and me to appear on the talk show "**Dr. Phil**" to discuss how we should address this serious issue without infringing on citizens' First Amendment rights. The main focus is to make these individuals accountable for their despicable actions online. Nobody deserves to be harassed, no matter what form of communication the person may be using. I believe our state laws in place now address this important issue and will keep up with our society's ever-changing technology.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other topic regarding state government, please visit my website, **e-mail me**, or call my office at (866) 271-2844.

Contact Information

Capitol Office

State Capitol
Room 426
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Website:

<http://www.senate.mo.gov/rupp>

Phone Number:

866.271.2844

Fax:

573.526.4766