



For Immediate Release: Dec. 3, 2010

Contact: Stacy Morse - (573) 751-3599

Senator Keaveny Reintroduces Bill to Increase Fines for Seat Belt Violations

JEFFERSON CITY — Senator Joe Keaveny, D-St. Louis, reintroduced legislation for the 2011 legislative session which would increase fines for motorists caught not wearing their seat belts. Missouri currently has a secondary seatbelt law in statute, but compliance is spotty. If passed, Senate Bill 24 will increase the fine for not wearing a seat belt from \$10 to \$50.

“The evidence shows that higher fines are associated with higher seat belt usage,” Sen. Keaveny said. “In fact, state surveys in 1998 and 1999 found that seat belt usage increased an average of six percent in states that had fines of \$30 or more.”

Senator Keaveny notes seat belt usage in Missouri consistently falls below the national average. Surveys find 84 percent of all Americans wear seat belts, but just 77.2 percent of Missouri motorists wear seat belts. Failure to regularly wear a safety belt can be deadly. In 2009, 425 people killed in traffic crashes weren’t wearing seat belts. Seven out of 10 Missourians killed in traffic crashes were unbuckled.

Senator Keaveny said last month’s *Click It or Ticket* campaign was a useful reminder to Missouri motorists to buckle up, but he contends increased fines will make a difference year round.

“The *Click It or Ticket* campaign last year resulted in more than 7,000 seat belt tickets,” Sen. Keaveny said. “That just shows the message about the importance of seat belts is not getting through to the public. Study after study shows that people don’t pay attention to seat belt laws if the fines are low. The courts fine people nearly \$80 for littering, but just \$10 for not wearing a seat belt. A traffic judge who plans to testify in the hearing told me that the \$10 fine does not even cover the cost of putting the case on the docket.”

For more information on the *Click It or Ticket* campaign and other state traffic safety initiatives, visit www.saveMOLives.com.

The First Regular Session of the 96th Missouri General Assembly convenes on Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2011.

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SENATOR JOSEPH KEAVENY
4TH SENATE DISTRICT
CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 329
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101



OFFICE:
(573) 751-3599
WWW.SENATE.MO.GOV/KEAVENY