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Practicing Back-to-School Safety

Across the state, Missouri students are heading back to school, which means more school buses are out on the roads and children are crossing the streets in busy school zones. All of us could use a reminder to slow down and watch out for kids as they bike and walk to school, as well as be mindful of school buses stopping to pick up students.

To drive home the need for motorists to be extra careful now that the 2010–2011 school year is underway, Safe Kids (www.safekids.org) has designated August as “Back to School Safety Month.” The organization, as well as the Missouri Department of Transportation, outlines several safety reminders for both drivers and kids that I would encourage you to follow to help ensure that Missouri students get to and from school and their school-related activities as safely as possible.

Reminders for drivers:

- Slow down and be especially alert in residential neighborhoods and school zones.
- Obey all traffic laws and speed limits, especially in construction zones.
- Be alert. Children arriving late for the bus may dart into the street without looking for cars.
- Take extra time to look for kids at intersections and on medians and curbs.
- Enter and exit driveways and alleys slowly and carefully.
- Watch for children on and near the road in the morning and during after-school hours.
- Reduce any distractions inside your car so you can concentrate on the road and your surroundings. In particular, try to avoid using your phone to talk or text while driving.

School Bus Safety:

- *Yellow flashing lights:* Five hundred feet before a school bus stops to load or unload children, the bus driver will activate yellow flashing lights to notify

drivers of the impending stop. These lights change from yellow to red when the bus comes to a complete stop.

- *Red flashing lights:* Sometimes accompanied by an extended “STOP” sign, red flashing lights alert drivers that the school bus is stopped to pick up or drop off children. Missouri law requires drivers to stop before they reach the bus when these signals are activated. You must remain stopped until the bus moves or the bus driver signals you to proceed with caution.

Reminders for kids:

- Cross the street with an adult until the age of 10.
- Cross the street at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks.
- Never run out into the streets or cross in between parked cars.
- Always walk in front of the bus where the driver can see you.
- Wait until the bus stops, the door opens and the driver says it is okay before stepping onto the bus.
- Walk at least three giant steps away from the side of the bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, tell the bus driver. Never try to pick it up because the driver may not be able to see you.
- Get to the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive.

For parents, it’s important to teach your children from an early age to know and practice basic traffic safety rules. Likewise, it’s important for drivers to be especially mindful of children traveling to and from school, and understand that they might not always be aware of their surroundings. Slowing down and paying attention will go a long way in helping to avoid a tragic accident. We can all do our part in making this a safe and happy school year.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact my office with your questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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