

Weekly Report
Week of 2-9

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Over the course of a legislative session many issues are debated but few are more important or more closely related to the core function of our State's government than providing a fair and equitable system of justice and keeping society safe from violent criminals. Last week the Senate gave first round approval to a bill I've sponsored (SB 1000) that dramatically expands Missouri's use of DNA technology to track convicted felons in our state.

The introduction of DNA as a law enforcement tool has produced excellent results in Missouri and other States around the nation. For example, in recent weeks authorities have finally been able to solve a rape/homicide that occurred over two decades ago. The violent criminal that had committed this brutal crime was identified when his DNA was matched against evidence from the crime scene that had been stored in the Missouri State Highway Patrol's database. As the examples from other states have shown, these types of "cold hits" increase dramatically when more criminals are required to give DNA samples.

A change is needed in Missouri because our current law only allows law enforcement to take DNA samples from criminals who have committed violent crimes or certain sexual offenses. Senate Bill 1000 would allow samples to be taken from all felons in the state, representing a huge increase in the overall number of samples taken. These samples are then entered into a nationwide database administered by the FBI, sending the clear message to criminals that regardless of where they run, their criminal past will eventually catch up with them if they decide to commit more crimes.

Not only will this type of DNA testing give law enforcement a tool to catch criminals and solve old cases, it also has the potential to free citizens who may have been wrongly convicted. While I strongly favor stiff penalties for those criminals who prey on others, I also take seriously the responsibility to make sure justice is truly done and the innocent are protected. In many cases, individuals have walked out of prison gates because DNA has proved conclusively that they were in fact, not guilty. For these citizens, SB 1000 provides that the state will provide them with a reimbursement check equal to the number of years they were wrongly incarcerated multiplied by the federal poverty level (currently about \$8,900 per year). While it is impossible to replace the years that have been lost, this check from the state will at least ensure that the individual is not thrown out on the street with merely the clothes on their back and an apology. The cost of this program is low and will be covered by fees paid by others convicted of crimes, not taxpayers.

Senate Bill 1000 is currently awaiting final approval by the Senate, after which it will be considered by the House of Representatives.

If you have 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.state.mo.us. Also, you can read any of the bills I file on my website at:

<http://www.senate.state.mo.us/04info/members/mem08.htm>). Thank you again for making it possible for me to serve in the Missouri Senate.