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Capitol Report
January 31, 2019

In House News:

House committees have begun to thoroughly examine legislation, looking at many priorities aimed at increasing the stability and security of Missourians. This week I presented my bill to modify training provisions for coroners before the House Committee on General Laws. My goal for this bill is to create a reliable system in each county with a coroner for reviewing the deaths of our loved ones. The House also reviewed two additional pieces of legislation for helping some of Missouri's most vulnerable citizens.

House Passes Bill to Protect Underage Victims of Sex Trafficking (HB 397):

House members gave overwhelming approval this week to legislation meant to protect underage victims of sex trafficking from prosecution. Lawmakers endorsed the change to ensure young people who are forced into prostitution aren't further traumatized by facing criminal charges.

The legislation would also allow a person guilty of prostitution while a minor to apply to the courts to have records of that crime expunged. In addition, it would add some offenses related to child abuse and sex trafficking to the state law's definition of "pattern of criminal gang activity." Advocates say the provision is necessary because the frequency of trafficking operations being conducted by gangs has increased in recent years.

House Committee Considers Legislation to Update State's Amber Alert System (HB 185):

A House committee heard testimony this week on a bill named in honor of Hailey Owens, a 10-year-old girl from Greene County who was kidnapped while walking home from a friend's house and then

murdered by her abductor. The bill's sponsor hopes to make changes to the state's Amber Alert system to protect other young people from suffering a similar fate.

"It was incredibly traumatizing," said State Rep. Curtis Trent, who sponsors the bill. "A lot of people, especially people with young families, were concerned that this sort of thing could happen. I think there was a lot of concern and outrage over the length of time it took to issue the Amber Alert. People were questioning the efficiency of that system, and so there was just a lot of uncertainty, a lot of confusion, and a lot of anger that such a thing had happened despite all the safeguards that had been attempted to be put in place to prevent it."

Soon after the arrest of her killer, state officials and lawmakers turned their attention to the Amber Alert System. Though witnesses saw Owens being abducted, more than two hours passed before an Amber Alert was issued to let authorities and the public statewide know to look for her, and what her kidnapper and his vehicle looked like.

The legislation would require the Amber Alert System to be tied into the Missouri Uniform Law Enforcement System (MULES), which is the computer system that allows all law enforcement in Missouri to communicate. That means once an officer enters information about a missing child into MULES, it would at the same time be available to the Amber Alert system.

"We want to prevent any future tragedy like this from occurring, and also we call the bill 'Hailey's Law' because we want to create a legacy and memorial for the girl that lost her life," said Trent.

State of the Judiciary Address

Members of the House and Senate gathered in the House Chamber this week to get an update on the state of Missouri's judicial branch. Lawmakers listened to the annual State of the Judiciary Address that was delivered by Missouri Supreme Court Chief Justice Zel Fischer.

In his address, Fischer told legislators, "We know our partners in the legislative and executive branches are committed to doing the best job possible to make Missouri better. We are no different. The state of the judiciary is good." He used his speech to address a variety of topics ranging from the importance of treatment courts to a new rule to benefit military spouses to a rule change that will make pretrial release conditions equitable for low-income defendants.

Fischer outlined how the courts have created a pathway for military spouses who are licensed attorneys to practice law while they are in Missouri. The new rule went into effect at the beginning of the year to allow lawyers with licenses in good standing in other jurisdictions and whose spouses are active service members stationed in Missouri or a contiguous state to apply for temporary admission to practice law in Missouri. Fischer said, "Allowing these qualified attorneys to share their legal talents with our citizens while they are in our state will honor the sacrifice they make as military spouses and will serve Missourians well."

I appreciate you allowing me to serve as your voice in Jefferson City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Houx". The letters are cursive and connected, with a large initial "D".

Dan Houx
State Representative

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