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By Annabeth Miller, SMT Editor

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon on Friday signed into a law a bill that repeals a controversial one passed earlier this year that dealt with teachers, students and online social media sites such as Facebook.

Nixon's action wipes away a law enacted earlier this year that barred teachers from using websites that allow "exclusive access" with students or former pupils age 18 or younger. The law generated an unexpected backlash, with teachers raising concerns they would be barred from using popular social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter that allow private messages.

A judge temporarily blocked the law shortly before it was to take effect in August, declaring that it "would have a chilling effect" on free-speech rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution. Nixon then added the law's repeal to the agenda for the special session that began in September.

Legislators, who had voted for the law this spring as part of a broader legislation on teacher abuse of students, voted overwhelmingly this fall to repeal the restrictions. But the most recent bill sent to the governor also requires school districts to develop their own policies by March 1 on the use of electronic media between employees and students in order to prevent improper communications.

Nixon signed the legislation with some hesitancy. He said school districts could find it challenging to develop policies that prevent improper communications without also preventing appropriate on-line conversations.

"This bill is not as good as it should be, but to veto it would return us to a bill that would be far worse," Nixon said in a written statement announcing his decision.

The Missouri State Teachers Association earlier this year filed suit against the law. On Friday the state educators group, said that it would decide within the coming weeks whether to drop the case. The judge's preliminary injunction against the original law was to remain in effect until Feb. 20 so that a hearing could be held on a permanent injunction.

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