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MO State Senator Doug Libla's Senate Report March 10, 2014

MARCH 10TH 2014 BY DEE LOFLIN

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*Submitted by
Dee Loflin, SMT Manager/Editor*

This week, the Senate gave its final approval to my Senate Bill 530, advancing this important measure to the House of Representatives. This legislation provides incentives for parents whose children have been removed from their home because of their illegal drug use to seek out treatment in a timelier manner. My goal is to get drug-addicted parents the help they need to provide a safe, nurturing home for their children, or depending on their lack of commitment to a healthy family unit, not let their children languish in the foster care system. **SB 530** changes how parental rights are terminated by adding to the circumstances under which a parent is considered unfit. Currently, children removed because of parental drug use averages 15 months before a Petition to Terminate Parental Rights (TPR) is ordered by the court. When drugs are involved, most parents continue to test positive for drugs. Federal and state law intends to secure the permanent placement of a child as quickly as possible, through TPR or guardianship. This legislation speeds up the process of TPR for those parents who are irresponsible and deemed unfit by the court. This bill shortens the timeline deemed necessary for family intervention performed by social workers, eliminating years of children languishing in foster care. As children age, their

hopes and dreams of being adopted diminish.

History shows after one year of their children placed in state custody, less than 20 percent of these parents ordered into a drug treatment program actually enroll. Nationally, 75 percent of children who were removed because of parental drug abuse and placed in state custody, and later returned to the home for reunification, are returned back to state custody. This back and forth, plus months and years of uncertainty, is very difficult for these children.

Missouri now has more than 12,000 children in the foster system, at an annual expense of more than \$52 million for foster home care. In the last 36 months, money spent for foster care has increased over 40 percent. This does not include the expense of legal representation, court costs, health care, and many other expenses borne by counties.

These children's education is negatively affected when they are forced into moving in and out of different homes due to the lack of stability. This has to change, because children have rights, too! I look forward to my bill continuing through the legislative process as it moves to the House of Representatives. The Senate also began debate on legislation that would raise the cap on the amount of revenue bonds that may be issued and limit the use of funds to renovate existing state and public higher education buildings. **Senate Bill 723** puts the process in place for deferred maintenance for buildings, which could be of help to Three Rivers College. We have an obligation as a state to take care of these buildings. This is a fundamental responsibility that has been pushed down the line for years. We must remember to keep focus on the safety of the individuals who work in these buildings, and protect some of our state's largest investments.

Recently in Poplar Bluff, concerned citizens living along West Hwy. 160 met regarding the safety of new road improvements now being planned for construction. In attendance were Rep. Steve Cookson, the Butler County Commission, Butler County Clerk Tonyi Deffendall, and MoDOT District Engineer Mark Shelton. Many good ideas were discussed regarding motorist and homeowners' safety, and the price of their property they would receive for the right-of-way. I appreciated hearing the input from the citizens who are directly impacted.

Capitol Visitors

William "Wilson" McNeary IV of Charleston was among the selected students who visited Jefferson City this week to showcase their research during the University

of Missouri Undergraduate Research Day at the Capitol. Mr. McNeary displayed his exciting research going on at the University of Missouri, which focuses on an issue he's passionate about: ensuring quality sanitation facilities for the world's population. In addition, a lot of visitors from the 25th District made their way to the State Capitol this week, despite all the weather we had back home.

The Missouri Cattleman's Association met to discuss issues coming before the Senate Agriculture Committee.

I also met with Mississippi County Recorder of Deeds George Bays about different issues affecting our counties.

Jason Comfort and Zach Hedrick from Dexter, along with Ron Mattli from Wappapello, visited for the insurance agents' legislative advocacy day at the Capitol. Joetta Martin from Poplar Bluff also stopped by.

If you would like to read more about the legislation or committees mentioned in this column, visit www.senate.mo.gov/libla. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you.

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