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Bringing News to Edgar County

24 August 2005

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## Edgar County experience strengthens sex offender law

Written by Staff

Wednesday, 24 August 2005

A new law sponsored by Rep. Roger Eddy (R-Hutsonville), Rep. Chapin Rose (R-Mahomet) and Sen. Dale Righter (R-Mattoon) closed a loop hole permitting registered child sex offenders some access to school property.

The Illinois Criminal Code of 1961 made it illegal for child sex offenders to be present on school property when children under the age of 18 are present, but the law also stated an offender who is a parent or guardian of a child attending the school can be on school property when the child is present.

"This new prohibition is the direct result of concerns raised by parents and law enforcement in Edgar County, where a convicted sex offender has been attending school sporting events," said Rose. "Similar situations have arisen in other areas of the state as well."

Rose credited Paris Police Department School Resource Officer Rich Wilson with pointing out the conflicting sections in the law.

"We brought the issue to Chapin, Roger and Sen. Dale Righter and they ran with it," said Wilson. "As a result, I believe we have made all schools in Illinois a safer place to be."

The change to the law prohibits convicted child sex offenders from attending school functions, even if they have a child participating in the event. The amendment clarifies that child sex offenders may be on school property only to attend conferences with school personnel when the conference pertains to the offender's child.

Child sex offender are obligated to inform the school principal in advance that they will be attending such a conference.

Eddy said Edgar County State's Attorney Matt Sullivan worked with the legislators to clarify and strengthen the law.

"Our children need to be protected from potential threats to their safety – that includes threats posed by the parents of other students," said Eddy. "This new law, spearheaded by local police and prosecutors, is another important step toward ensuring our schools are safe havens for all of our students."

The new law became effective July 11 when Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed



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Ned Jenison, Publisher

the legislation.

Rose said more needs to be done to strengthen the prohibition against sex offenders in schools.

"Passage of this bill has brought another area of concern to our attention: sex offenders are still able to enter schools to vote," said Rose. "Edgar County board member Dan Winans and local city officials recently pointed out this loophole to us. Therefore, Roger and I are researching legislation to close this loophole as well."

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