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...from the Illinois House of Representatives

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Flider Advances Measure to Protect Children from Cyber-Bullying

Measure in Response to Missouri Teen Suicide

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Seeking to protect minors on the internet, state Rep. Bob Flider (D-Mount Zion) passed legislation through the House Criminal Law Committee on Thursday that would make it a crime for an adult to harass or intimidate a minor online.

“As technology rapidly advances, the law must keep pace, particularly when protecting young people,” Flider said. “It was not that long ago that social networking websites like MySpace and Facebook were relatively unknown. Now they are part of our children’s everyday life and certain steps need to be taken to ensure safety protection.”

Flider advanced House Bill 4198, which makes it illegal for any adult to contact a minor online for the purpose of intimidating, harassing or causing physical or emotional harm. Flider worked with law enforcement to introduce the bill in response to the 2006 suicide of Missouri teenager Megan Meier. Before tragically ending her own life, Meier was lured into a false-confidence by a classmate’s mother on the online networking site MySpace. The mother, claiming to be a 16-year old boy named Josh, pretended to be online friends with Meier only to later send a series of cruel and intimidating messages that led the emotionally troubled young girl to commit suicide.

While Missouri law enforcement officials have not charged the mother with a crime, the municipal government adopted an internet harassment ordinance prompting Flider to initiate a similar policy for Illinois. Flider worked with the Illinois State Police, Attorney General’s office and Illinois State Attorneys Association in drafting the legislation.

“Our current state law has no means to prosecute an adult who, in a case like the Meier incident, goes out of their way to use electronic means to hurt a child,” Flider said. “What happened to Megan Meier was clear case of an adult harassing a minor, and should a similar case arise in Illinois, this law will give the police and prosecutors the means to punish those responsible. Furthermore, parents will have greater incentive to report any adult who is inappropriately contacting their child through a social network site or other websites.”

House Bill 4198 now moves to the House floor for further consideration. For more information or to learn more about protecting children on the internet, call Flider’s constituent service office at (217) 428-2708.

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