

CAPITOL UPDATE



State Representative Joe Atkins

July 2005

TOUGH NEW CRIME LAW SOON TAKES EFFECT—BILL INCLUDES REP. ATKINS' PROVISIONS ON SEX OFFENDERS, METH, AND STEROIDS

The tough new crime law recently passed by the Minnesota Legislature and signed by the Governor will go into effect in four weeks. The law invests \$1.7 billion into public safety measures and increases penalties for some of the worst offenders in the state. Representative Joe Atkins was a leading contributor to the important legislation, authoring provisions to toughen restrictions on sex offenders, meth pushers, and steroid dealers.

"This bill is a real landmark in public safety legislation," Rep. Atkins said. "It will keep the worst criminals behind bars, improve controls on those that must be released, and help to prevent crimes from being committed. This all means safer communities for us and for our kids."

SEX OFFENDERS

Several of the most important sections of the bill stiffen restrictions and increase penalties for sex offenders. High profile cases in recent years have heightened awareness of this issue, most notably the murder of Dru Sjodin and the Dakota County arrest of Justin Farnsworth for abusing his girlfriend's daughter.

Under the new law, the worst sex offenders will be in prison for life, without the possibility of release. The law also takes dramatic steps to control lesser sex offenders who must be released back into the community. Many of

them will be required to submit to regular polygraph tests, wear monitoring bracelets, and be photographed twice a year, to prevent them from disguising their identity by changing their appearance. Finally, an important measure authored by Rep. Atkins addresses the circumstances leading to the Farnsworth case by not allowing sex offenders from being granted custody of unrelated children.

"We need to do all we can to protect kids from these dangerous people," Rep. Atkins said. "I really wish this law wasn't necessary, but the recent case in Hastings shows that it is. There are few things more important than keeping our children away from those who would harm them."

METH

The new crime law also takes significant steps to address the methamphetamine epidemic in Minnesota. This dangerous new drug has become a major public safety concern in Dakota County. It has been particularly hard to control because it can be easily produced from certain typical household chemicals.

The new law takes important steps to control access to these chemicals, most importantly pseudoephedrine, a common drug for colds and flu found in such products as Sudafed. These drugs must now be placed behind the counter in drugstores. In addition, buyers must now be 18 years of age, must sign a log of the purchase, and cannot buy more than 6 grams

For more information about this and other issues, visit Joe's website at www.JoeAtkins.com

JULY 2005 LEGISLATIVE SURVEY

1.) Do you believe taxpayer money should be used to construct sports stadiums?

Yes No

2.) Should the University of Minnesota eliminate the General College?

Yes No

3.) Do you believe the state should have a fund dedicated specifically to transit?

Yes No

4.) Should hospitals, HMOs and health insurers be required to report executive pay and compensation to the public?

Yes No

5.) Do you think that state money should be provided for students to attend private or religious schools?

Yes No

You can either mail to Rep. Atkins' office or e-mail to rep.joe.atkins@house.mn your responses. Thank you!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

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in any 30-day period. These measures have been found to greatly reduce the production of meth in other states.

Rep. Atkins introduced an amendment to the meth provisions that make the law the strongest of its kind in the country. Under the Atkins Amendment the law will also apply to gel caps and liquids, if it is found that meth makers turn to those forms of pseudoephedrine when tablets become unavailable on store shelves.

Rep. Atkins learned from Arkansas crime lab officials that making meth from gel caps requires a few extra steps and takes as little as an hour. "Taking away

tablets from meth makers without taking away gel caps and liquids is like taking away guns from a serial killer but letting him keep knives. It isn't effective," Rep. Atkins said on the House floor. The amendment passed on a nearly unanimous vote and became part of the bill.

STEROIDS

In addition to stepping up controls on meth, Rep. Atkins also authored provisions in the new law increasing penalties for dealers of illegal performance enhancing drugs. The new law attacks the steroid problem in several ways.

First, it creates tougher penalties for selling steroids, especially to minors—up to 20 years in jail and a \$250,000 fine. It also updates Minnesota's existing law, which prohibits only

about 10% of the steroids currently on the market. Finally, it would bring Minnesota into conformance with federal law on the subject, making enforcement of steroids laws easier.

"We need to make sure that we are teaching our children about the values of good health and fair play," Rep. Atkins said, "and getting rid of steroids is an important part of that. Our greatest fear would be that our children would look at all of this and start to believe that cheating and harming their bodies through steroids is acceptable, or the only way to accomplish what their heroes have accomplished."

The Crime Law also addresses a wide variety of other public safety concerns. It helps law enforcement agencies through several measures, including increased reimbursements for bullet-proof vests and by making it a crime to flee from a police officer on foot. The law also takes new steps to reign in gang violence, by increasing penalties for gang members who commit crimes against children.



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