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House Democrats propose expansion of meth, DNA databases *Safeguards against unfair red-light camera tickets also part of public safety agenda*

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – House Democrats today proposed upgrading Missouri’s methamphetamine precursor database so law enforcement agencies can better track suspicious purchases of common cold medicines used to manufacture the illegal drug.

HB 1927 sponsored by state Rep. Michael Frame, D-Eureka, would authorize the Missouri State Highway Patrol to establish a real-time electronic logbook to monitor sales of nonprescription drugs containing pseudoephedrine – a key ingredient in the production of meth. The bill builds on a law Missouri enacted several years ago that requires retailers to log all purchases of such medicines. Such logs, however, are not easily searchable by law enforcement.

“By giving law enforcement instant access to sales records and allowing officers to track multiple purchases at different locations by the same person, we can do serious damage to the meth industry in this state,” Frame said.

The public safety component of House Democrats’ Moving Missouri Forward legislative agenda for 2008 also includes legislation by state Rep. John Burnett, D-Kansas City, to expand Missouri’s DNA database to include people charged, but not yet convicted, of felonies and juveniles who commit crimes that would be considered felonies if adjudicated in the adult criminal justice system. DNA currently is collected only from those who are convicted or plead guilty to a felony or any sex crime, including misdemeanors.

“When a criminal enters the corrections system upon conviction, his or her DNA is entered into the database and often produces ‘hits’ that enable police to solve other crimes,” Burnett said. “Police will be able to solve pending cases much sooner if DNA samples are collected at the point of arrest, as already happens with fingerprints.”

In cases in which a person is acquitted or the charge is dropped, their DNA information would be removed from the state’s database. Seven states, including neighboring Kansas, currently collect DNA from felony arrestees. Thirty-five states collect DNA from juvenile offenders. Burnett’s bill will be similar to HB 670 from last year.

To address concerns about fairness resulting from the growing use of red-light cameras by Missouri municipalities, state Rep. Jeff Roorda, D-Barnhart, will file a bill to require a police officer to review photographic evidence of an alleged traffic violation before a motorist can be issued a ticket.

“When you have automated systems spitting out tickets without human oversight, Missourians will naturally question the legitimacy of the citations,” Roorda said. “With prior police review of the evidence, they will be able to weed out unfair or questionable violations and avoid hassling innocent motorists.”

Roorda will also sponsor legislation that would allow police to catch fleeing suspects without having to engage in potentially dangerous high-speed pursuits. The measure, which will be identical to HB 284 Roorda filed last year, would authorize the state to provide police departments with matching grants for systems that deploy projectiles to tag fleeing vehicles.

“A GPS tracking system will allow police to mark a fleeing vehicle and then withdraw while tracking the suspect until they can more safely move in to make an arrest,” Roorda said. “With this technology, police and innocent motorists can stay out of harm’s way and avoid a high-speed pursuit and the potential for a tragic result.”

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