



## SENATOR STEWART J. GREENLEAF



12th Senatorial District • Summer 2006

*Over the years, it has been my privilege to sponsor and advance legislation with the goal of protecting children. To date, about 40 of my initiatives focusing on young people's equal access to justice, health and safety, and improving opportunities for familial stability have become law.*

*School and amusement park safety, substance abuse assistance, ensuring the immediate search for missing children, and protecting young people in the legal system are just a few of the subjects my legislation has addressed. Particularly gratifying was the approval in 2004 of the law providing a child victim with the opportunity for alternative testimony when the child is too traumatized to testify in open court. Recently, the Senate unanimously approved legislation enhancing the protections of Megan's Law, a statute that I authored in 1995 to assess and identify violent predators and require the registration of sex offenders and the notification of neighbors when a predator locates nearby. A list of my sponsored laws and legislation on child protection issues is available at [www.senatorgreenleaf.com](http://www.senatorgreenleaf.com).*

*Keeping our children's well-being a priority and ensuring their fair treatment in the justice system is an ongoing effort and I am pleased to offer this update on child protection issues in the General Assembly.*

### Kids in Court Law Upheld

**P**ennsylvania's Child Witness Testimony Law has been upheld by State Superior Court after its use was challenged in a Berks County rape conviction in which the child victim testified via closed circuit television. The June 23 decision demonstrates that the 2004 law allowing children under age 16 to use televised testimony can withstand appeals. Greenleaf said he is heartened by the decision, noting that a child who has been traumatized by witnessing a murder or whose life has been devastated by sexual abuse often need the alternative testimony option that the law provides – especially when such cases involve family members. The Pennsylvania statute is similar to laws in 37 other states that provide a process for a judge to determine, through a hearing process, if a child witness needs to utilize electronic testimony.

### Curbing Predators

- Approved by the Senate, Pennsylvania's Jessica's Law (**SB944**) would establish strong penalties for adults convicted of serious sexual assault involving a child under 13 years of age, and even stronger penalties when the crime results in serious bodily injury. The bill would authorize use of GPS monitoring of sexual predators and establish child safety zones near schools and other facilities where children traditionally gather. It would authorize criminal penalties for those who knowingly assist child predators in evading registration requirements; establish an alert system to notify the public when an offender fails to comply with tracking requirements; and provide for more information on offenders on the Megan's Law web site.
- **SB1054**, approved by the Senate, would require the listing of addresses of all sex offenders – not just sexually violent predators – to be placed on the Megan's Law web site along with a description of the offense.

*Delilah Rumburg, executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), stands with honorees Sen. Greenleaf and former Pennsylvania First Lady Michele M. Ridge at a PCAR event in Hershey. Greenleaf was given an award for his legislative work on behalf of children, and Mrs. Ridge was honored for leading the Vision of Hope Campaign to protect children from sexual violence.*



## School Safety

- A new law will require federal criminal history checks on all prospective public and private school employees so that schools will be informed of applicants' criminal records from other states. Prior state law required Pennsylvania State Police clearance for applicants, but provided for FBI criminal history checks only if school districts chose to submit the fingerprints of applicants who had lived in

Pennsylvania for less than two years to the FBI for criminal history information. Applicants will bear the cost of the federal checks and schools may hire applicants for a provisional period while background checks are underway. The new law will take effect on April 1, 2007.

- **Senate Bill 71**, sponsored by Sen. Greenleaf, aims to reduce bullying by requiring school districts to address the bullying policy or in the student code of conduct.
- **Senate Bill 552**, sponsored by Sen. Greenleaf, would require school buses to be equipped with seat belts and require seat belt use by students.
- **Senate Bill 212**, sponsored by Sen. Greenleaf, directs the Department of Transportation to conduct a study of school zone safety to find ways of improving driver awareness and traffic control to enhance the safety of students and staff.

## Family Stability

**SENATE BILL 74** is a Greenleaf measure that passed the Senate and is poised for a House vote. It would provide new considerations for the courts in making custody and visitation decisions focused on the best interests of the child in terms of familial relationships and educational and social continuity.

## Child Health

Implementing legislation for the Cover All Kids initiative is expected to be voted on this fall by the Legislature. If enacted, the program will provide the opportunity for every child age 18 and under in the state to have comprehensive health care coverage through a combination of state and federal dollars and reasonable premium payments by families with the means to contribute. The plan, Senate Bill 1192, co-sponsored by Sen. Greenleaf, would extend the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to the four percent of young Pennsylvanians currently not covered by a family plan,

medical assistance, or CHIP. Premiums ranging from \$35 to \$145 per month would be paid by families, depending upon family income and size, for each enrolled child. The initiative would also seek to identify and sign up for CHIP or medical assistance the approximately 108,000 state children eligible for, but not enrolled in, publicly-funded health care. CHIP provides for immunizations, glasses, hearing services, medical and dental checkups, and mental health and substance abuse treatment. If enacted, the Cover All Kids program could take effect in January. For current guidelines on CHIP, call 1-800-986-KIDS or visit [www.chipcoverspakids.com](http://www.chipcoverspakids.com).

## Child Protection Information

- **The Center for Safe Schools** ([www.center-school.org/pko](http://www.center-school.org/pko)) site for "Protecting Kids Online" has a link to a child-friendly site ([www.imsafeonline.org](http://www.imsafeonline.org)) and will soon have free DVD for parents about guarding kids from internet dangers. Call 717-763-1661, extension 151, if you do not have internet access.
- **The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency** ([www.pccd.state.pa.us](http://www.pccd.state.pa.us)) has an online brochure "Cyber Rent" about child internet precautions. Click on Education and Youth and then Internet Safety to locate it. This site also has the 2005 Youth Survey on drug and alcohol usage by Pennsylvania students grades 6-12.
- **The State Police Megan's Law** site contains information on more than 8,000 offenders by county, city, zip code, name, alias and SVP (sexually violent predator) listing, at [www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us](http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us). Call toll free 1-866-771-3170 if you do not have access to the site, which contains links to the National Sex Offender Public Registry and other organizations providing information on offenders.
- **US Department of Health and Human Resources** anti-bullying web site ([www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov)) provides child-oriented information about bullying prevention.
- **The Governor's Commission for Children and Families** ([www.pachildren.state.pa.us](http://www.pachildren.state.pa.us)) offers resources for a range of problems concerning children and teens.

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