



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senator Michael Gibbons Named 2005 Child Advocate of the Year

JEFFERSON CITY – Because of his dedication to improving the lives of Missouri’s children, specifically through legislation he passed last year creating a Comprehensive Children’s Mental Health System in Missouri, Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, has been named the 2005 Child Advocate of the Year. The Missouri Alliance for Children, Youth and Families present the award during the Annual Child Advocacy Day rally at the state capitol.

“The creation of the Comprehensive Children’s Mental Health System is the perfect example of how government should work,” Gibbons said. “From a handful of constituents’ concerns, we were able to develop a program that has now helped more than 100 children and their families across our state.”

Gibbons says he introduced the legislation when a constituent made him aware of their dilemma of losing custody of their child in order for the state to provide the child mental health care to meet his or her needs. Beth Griffin, executive director for Citizens for Missouri’s Children, presented the award on behalf of the alliance. She worked with frustrated parents to bring the problem to light and commended Gibbons dedication to seeing the Comprehensive Children’s Mental Health System through to fruition.

“The children of Missouri are truly fortunate that Sen. Gibbons is their champion on this issue,” Griffin said. “Many children will benefit from his work for years to come.”

The Comprehensive Children’s Mental Health System was created by the passage of SB 1003 in 2004. Since it took effect last August, the program has been fully implemented in all 45 circuit court systems in Missouri. SB 1003 defined criteria to pinpoint children who only have mental health needs from being placed in the custody of the state’s Children’s Division.

“I had families coming to me, asking me why they had to hand over custody of their children to the state, just to get their children mental health help,” Gibbons said. “I didn’t have an answer for them, no one did. So instead, we worked for two years to change the law so that no child with only mental health needs will ever be removed from their home again.”

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To date, 112 youth have been identified as meeting the custody diversion protocol set forth by SB 1003. Of those, 27 have been recommended to the court to return home, while 11 have already been returned to their parents' custody. Currently, the system is working to identify children before they are turned over to the Children's Division by having Family Support Teams create individualized plans to help them.

"I'm glad to know that I played a role in making sure that as long as kids aren't in harm's way, they can now stay in their parents' care and still receive the help and services they need," Gibbons said. "I'm honored to receive an award for playing my small part in this cause."

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