



AG ADVOCATES PACKAGE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT BILLS

(MONTGOMERY)--Attorney General Luther Strange today announced a package of law enforcement bills that he is advocating to strengthen and support law enforcement in Alabama. These include bills to more effectively fight illegal gambling, to regulate synthetic marijuana, to preserve citizens' rights and the integrity of legal proceedings, to combat looting, and to protect law enforcement officers.

"During my first year as Attorney General, I have been honored to meet with law enforcement officers throughout Alabama and I am impressed and grateful for their dedication to protect our citizens and enforce our laws," said Attorney General Strange. "These bills reflect concerns they have shared with me about changes needed in the laws to help them perform these important duties. I hope that the Legislature will give these bills their attention and take these actions to help the people of Alabama."

Fighting Illegal Gambling. The Attorney General will push for improvements to statutes to make our illegal gambling laws stronger and more effective. Under current law the maximum penalty for any illegal gambling enterprise is a misdemeanor, regardless of how many millions of dollars are being made from this illegal activity.

- The maximum penalties for the crimes of promoting illegal gambling and the possession of gambling records in the first-degree should be increased from class A misdemeanors to class C felonies. This would deter large-scale illegal gambling enterprises and also restore the punishment range to its original form when the Legislature first passed these statutes in 1977.
- The maximum penalty for the crime of possessing more than 10 slot machines should be increased from a class A misdemeanor to a class C felony.
- Law enforcement needs the authority to seize and condemn real property that is being used for purposes of illegal gambling. After a trial in circuit court, the property would be sold and proceeds would go to the law enforcement agencies that seized the property. This would create consistency in the criminal code and treat illegal gambling casinos in the same manner as illegal drug houses.

Stopping Metal Theft. Senate Bill 35 arises from The Metal Theft Task Force, organized in 2011 to develop legislation to deal with the increasingly widespread theft of copper and other metals. Members of the coalition include manufacturers, secondary metal recyclers, business, law enforcement, church leaders, and others who have been impacted by metal theft. This legislation will strengthen existing law by creating a statewide digital database, increasing criminal penalties, putting limits on cash transactions and many other safeguards. SB 35 is sponsored by Senators Ben Brooks and Cam Ward and Rep. Bill Poole. SB 35 is scheduled for consideration by the Senate Judiciary Committee at 1 p.m. today.



Banning Synthetic Drugs. House Bill 158 sponsored by Representatives Allen Farley and Randy Wood and Senate Bill 208 sponsored by Senator Arthur Orr regulate synthetic marijuana and other similar substances. Synthetic substances that mimic marijuana or other drugs, often referred to as "spice," "bath salts" or various other names, are being created with chemical compounds which had not been identified and prohibited as controlled substances under state law. The State Department of Public Health previously has taken regulatory action regarding this, and now the classification of the chemicals and chemical compounds as controlled substances under state law would give law enforcement stronger tools to combat their abuse. HB 158 is scheduled for consideration in the House Judiciary Committee at 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

Protecting Alabamians from False Legal Documents and Sham Legal Proceedings. Two bills are particularly designed to protect the rights of Alabamians and to preserve the integrity of legal proceedings:

- House Bill 17 sponsored by Rep. Blaine Galliher and Senate Bill 64 sponsored by Sen. Cam Ward deals with false instruments that may be filed against public officials or law enforcement to hinder rightful claims to their property, and provides a process to facilitate the legitimate cancellation of such claims. HB 17 is scheduled for consideration in the House Judiciary Committee at 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.
- House Bill 99 would protect citizens from sham legal proceedings. Existing law does not provide specific crimes regarding impersonating a police officer or falsely asserting authority as a court official or other public official or employee in a sham legal proceeding or document that is not authorized under state law and conducted lawfully. Penalties range from class B misdemeanor to class C felony. This bill is sponsored by Rep. Randy Wood.

Preserving Law Enforcement Retirement Benefits. Legislation will be proposed to provide for law enforcement overtime compensation to be counted toward retirement benefits. Under current law, retirement contributions for law enforcement officers and firefighters does not include overtime payments. This bill would amend current law to include overtime payments for calculating retirement benefits to these public servants. The Attorney General pledged to law enforcement that he would work to have this law changed as quickly as possible, and this bill would do so.

Combating Looting. Legislation will be proposed to address looting problems that Alabama has suffered after catastrophic tornadoes and other disasters. At this time state law does not specifically cover the crime of looting. The Attorney General wants to bring strong protections for our citizens in such times of disaster and for looting to be prosecuted as a class C felony. This law would apply when an official state of emergency has been declared.

Protecting Law Enforcement Officers. Senate Bill 91 provides tough penalties for the disarming of a law enforcement officer. Under current law there is no specific crime for disarming a law enforcement or corrections officer. This bill would make it a class A felony to intentionally remove a firearm or weapon, or to deprive a law enforcement or corrections officer of its use when the officer is acting within the scope of his duty and the person reasonably should have known that this was a law enforcement or corrections officer. This bill is sponsored by Sen. Tammy Irons.