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## No progress on bail bond regulations



Written by

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There has been a recent effort to further regulate the bail bond industry in Missouri. So far, it hasn't made much progress.

The Missouri Bail Bond Study Committee conducted a yearlong study of the industry and state statutes before submitting recommendations to the state legislature in January 2010.

Among those recommendations were more initial training for bond agents, withholding licenses for convicted felons and increased fines for violations.

Almost half of the 15-member committee were representatives of the bail bond industry while the other half consisted of law enforcement, legislators and court employees.

Among them was Greene County Judge Dan Conklin.

Conklin, whose son is a general agent in Springfield, is a staunch advocate for the bail bond industry but feels further regulation is warranted.

"Bond agents are losing credibility," he said.

Conklin, who helped draft current Missouri statute regulating the industry, said laws should do more to scrutinize finances of bondsmen.

However, he said the powers generally given to bond agents should remain intact.

Four bills have been introduced in the Missouri legislature carrying language from the committee's recommendations but none has become law.

The most recent attempt, House Bill No. 524, died after it was referred to the Insurance Policy Committee.

That bill would have permitted further scrutiny of a bond agent's finances and increased the required initial training from 24 to 40 hours.

Tim Brenner is an instructor at one of the only approved initial training providers in

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southwest Missouri, Southern Missouri Judicial Services.

In two, 12-hour days, Brenner prepares people -- some with prior law enforcement experience and some "right off the street" -- to become bondsmen.

"I don't feel the 24-hour block of instruction is enough," he said.

Brenner and his small staff teach apprehension techniques, terminology, and how to properly fill out bail bond paperwork.

More than half of the class, Brenner said, is reviewing state statute.

Brenner said further regulation of those laws would be good for the industry, which has seen its share of controversy.

Brenner, who was a law enforcement officer for 15 years before becoming an instructor, tells his students that even though they have the authority, they shouldn't always use it.

For example, an agent usually won't have to kick a door down to find a fleeing client, he said.

"What goes in must come out," is a common statement in his class, he said.

Brenner also encourages his students to renotify local law enforcement every four to six hours if it takes longer than anticipated to find and apprehend a client.

Brenner says it is illegal for a licensed bail bond agent to have anyone who is not licensed with the agent during fugitive recovery.

"If you have your wife with you when you spot your guy, you can't go get 'em," he said.



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Conklin

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