

School fights now warrant felonies

Staff Editorial

There is a criminal law overhaul in Missouri and the 1,000-page legislation is confusing and scaring residents in the state, especially students of Missouri schools.

The most expansive changes to Missouri's criminal code since the 1970's went into effect January 1. The biggest change in the law is the creation of a class E felony. The purpose of this change is to more effectively tier punishments for criminal offenses. When the news broke of this change, the Hazelwood and Ferguson-Florissant school districts issued statements notifying parents and students that students could now be charged with felonies for getting into fights at school or harassing other students. The editorial board of The Jag considers this law to be ridiculous.

What now falls under a class E felony is 3rd degree assault and, in addition to that, harassment has been upgraded from a misdemeanor to a class E felony.

According to St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "under the new law, a person who "knowingly causes physical injury to another person" will have committed the felony of third-degree assault."

Also, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Harassment will be a felony, rather than a misdemeanor, if the victim suffers "emotional distress" from an act committed with that purpose."

A simple look to the impacts of this new legislation will exemplify what exactly is ridiculous about this new law.

Firstly, it seems that the law will perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline, which legislators claim to be combating.

The addition of the proposition of a felony to school discipline has runoff effects of tainting a student for the rest of his or her life. In a criminal court of law, a drop of doubt justifies a guilty verdict and that is being likened to the lives of students. A single mistake freshman year could follow a student for the rest of his or her life and possibly prove detrimental in the future. What's most problematic is it is thought that students don't fully know the impact of their decisions at high-school age.

Eraka Bath, a forensic child psychiatrist at UCLA said, "The area of the brain we use to make decisions and distinguish right from wrong, the prefrontal cortex, isn't fully formed until around the age of 23."

Scientifically, the harsh punishments attributed to students at such a young age are unjustified and unfair.

Secondly, we have to look at who will most commonly be effected by this law. Inner city schools are at an inherent disadvantage in a myriad of ways, from funding, to caliber of teacher, to the maturity of issues administrators and students have to deal with. And the new law adds one more disadvantage. The public sentiment is that inner city schools are the blemishes upon America's public education record, and that is especially true considering that 35 percent of males in inner city schools are suspended at least once with the majority of the disciplinary infractions being fighting. Disciplinary action is heavily relied on in inner city schools which means this new Missouri law will only make the harm done to these kids being suspended permanent.

Finally, there is always the issue of race. Is this new law inadvertently targeting a specific race? The funny thing when it

comes to that question is that statistics already shows disciplinary action is targeting a specific race.

According to 2015-2016 Federal data on "the discipline gap", Missouri is home to the largest ethnic gap in school suspensions suspending 15 percent more of its African-American students than white students.

This new Missouri law will proliferate the punishment for fighting and the status quo is demonstrating the disproportionate impact of suspensions on African-American students. Regardless of why the statistic is what it is, the bottom line is we would be fools to advocate for a law that could hand a felony to high school students for a school fight particularly in the case of disproportionate impacts.

Nevertheless, schools are not always forced to report fighting incidents to law enforcement, which means not each and every fight would be felony worthy. It depends on the severity of the fight. But harassment is an infraction that schools must report to law enforcement according to state law. Which, according to the law, means if a victim becomes "emotionally distressed" the agitator could be up for a felony.

Multiple legal experts have issued statements saying that this law "will not criminalize student behavior" and people are "blowing this out of proportion." But, in any case, we can't stand for a law that potentially scars a child for the remainder of their life. There are a host of ulterior questions that rise with the discussion of this new law. Implications like the school to prison pipeline, burdening inner city schools, and race must be answered before legislators can possibly decide on a fair and just way to set standards that decrease school violence.

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KKK is not terrorism

Matthew Willis

Reporter

In the vocabulary of most Americans, there are a few words set aside only to be associated with the nastiest the world has to offer.

Yet, after a popular petition in the year 2015 on the White House government website, the administration of former President Barack Obama refused to classify the Ku Klux Klan as a terrorist organization.

Another very similar petition came last year, and to no avail.

This may not look reasonable at one's first glance, but there is an explanation for such a decision to be made in an administration known to be very critical of hate crimes.

The primary purpose for not classifying the KKK as a terrorist group was, and likely still is, the First Amendment.

People have the freedom of assembly.

"Simply believing in white supremacy or belonging to a white supremacist group—while abhorrent—is not a crime," reads the White House response from 2015. "The federal government has successfully charged white supremacists over the years using many federal statutes, including those prohibiting civil rights violations and solicitation to commit crimes of violence."

In other words, white supremacists are handled on a case-by-case basis.

That may not bode well for certain individuals who liken the Klan to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Terrorist tactics have undoubtedly been used by the Ku Klux Klan in the past and in the present, but

one must understand differences in the type of terror that people associated with the Klan have executed.

The primary form of terror that federal agencies combat domestically is Lone-Wolf terrorism. Lone-Wolf terror is perpetrated by, as the name suggests, only one person. That individual may have connections to hate groups (such as the Klan), but works alone.

Another detail about the Ku Klux Klan is that it is very divided. Unsurprisingly, people who can't get along well with other people often don't get along well with other people who are similar to them.

Thus, individual chapters of the Klan have varying degrees of extremism. They are all bigots,

but not all are terrorists.

That ties into Lone-Wolf terror, as it's not so much the entire group that is a terrorist threat but only certain radicals among the radicals.

Concerning terrorism, a little knowledge is a danger. The motivations to conduct terrorist attacks are complicated and dynamic.

Overgeneralizing the threat of terrorism has notably been done before (and continues to be done) in Vladimir Putin's Russia. The disappearances of journalists and other political attacks are done in the name of mitigating terror, and the costly Second Chechen War was won by Russia in a frenzy of denouncing all rebels as terrorists. In that war, tens of thousands of civilians were killed in a sloppy, yet highly effective Russian offensive. That, too, was done in the name of fighting terror.

The biggest threat that exists to our freedom may not be terrorism after all, but an overly zealous government bent on fighting it.

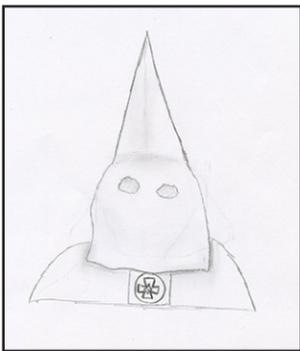


Illustration by Colton Robertson

Don't give up your resolutions yet

Olivia's Outlook



Olivia Decker
Editor-in-Chief

Around this time of year is when many people begin to feel discouraged because of their long list of failed New Year's Resolutions; maybe they haven't been using their gym membership as much as planned, or they've had a few too many cheat days, or maybe they've realized that their goals were unrealistic and have completely given up hope. Most of this is due to the make-or-break attitude surrounding New Year's Resolutions that ultimately results in no actual progress taking place.

Wanting to improve certain things about your life isn't a bad thing, and setting goals for yourself is essential to personal growth, nevertheless, the excessive expectations surrounding New Year's Resolutions breeds disappointment if even the most unrealistic goals are not met. At the end

overnight.

Only going to the gym two times a week instead of five days isn't the end of the world; small steps are better than no steps at all, and becoming discouraged will do nothing except push you farther and farther away from your goal.

So, if you are one of the people who feels upset and discouraged because your resolutions haven't lived up to your expectations, my advice to you is not to worry. There's no time limit to achieving your goals, and if it's something that is truly important to you, don't completely give up and wait until 2018 to try again. Take things slowly and focus on small things to do every day that will slowly help you reach your full potential.

Our Policy:

The Jag is produced monthly by journalism students in the Newspaper II class under auspices of the Blue Springs School District and the direction of the principal. Newspaper I students supplement the staff as reporters.

All unsigned editorials represent the opinion of the majority of The Jag editorial board.

The Jag also intends to provide an open forum of ideas for students, parents, faculty, and patrons of the school district.

Letters to the editor may be submitted to Room 913 care of the Editor-in-Chief. We reserve the right to edit all letters for length and content.

Our Mission:

The mission of The Jag student newspaper is to provide the student body with newsworthy, accurate, and entertaining information in a professional manner on various activities and events affecting South and the Blue Springs Community.

Reader Feedback:

Letters to the editor are encouraged and should be submitted to room 913. Letters must be signed by the author to be considered for publication, and they should be no more than 500 words.

The staff of the Jag reserves the right to edit letters for content and length.

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