



Missouri 'revenge porn' bill advances amid Greitens scandal

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A proposal in the Missouri Legislature to outlaw “revenge porn” has gained momentum amid sexual misconduct allegations against powerful men across the country including a case close to home — the one involving Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens.

The Senate approved a bill Wednesday that would make anyone who intentionally distributed a sexual image of someone without their consent guilty of a class D felony, which carries a maximum penalty of seven years in prison. Even threatening to release compromising images could result in a four-year sentence.

The bill was on the table long before the governor was charged with allegedly taking a photo of a partially nude woman during a sexual encounter in 2015 and threatening to release it if she revealed their relationship. Greitens faces a trial that begins May 14 on a felony invasion of privacy charge.

But the accusations against the governor, along with the prominence of the movement to highlight sexual misconduct, appear to have given the measure new urgency.

No senators voted against the proposal, and only a single representative voted “no” in February when an earlier version of the bill was approved by the House. In contrast, similar proposals introduced last year and the year before never made it out of their House committees, while a related bill was approved by a committee in 2014 but was never taken up by the full House.

“I think that Gov. Greitens’ actions have demonstrated to us that, yeah, people are paying more attention than perhaps they did before,” Democratic Sen. Jill Schupp said.

In the House, Democratic Rep. Brandon Ellington voiced support for the bill by referencing #MeToo, and women around the country who have accused politicians, businessmen, filmmakers and other powerful people of harassment and abuse. Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, a Democrat from University City, expressed sympathy for the woman the governor is accused of photographing.

Greitens has admitted to an extramarital affair but has repeatedly denied any blackmail and said his relationship with his former hairdresser was consensual.

The charge against Greitens stems from the alleged photo that prosecutors said could have been transmitted to a computer. Taking such a photo without consent is already

illegal. But Sen. Gary Romine, a Farmington Republican and the proposal's Senate sponsor, pointed out that Missouri law doesn't specifically touch on dissemination, which has become increasingly easy in the smartphone era.

"It is very frustrating to our law enforcement folks," he said. "They really have to struggle to find a law that would be applicable to deal with this type of activity."

The bill also would allow victims to sue for up to \$10,000, and unlike most proposals it would take effect immediately. Internet service providers could not be held liable for carrying the explicit images.

The amended bill now heads back to the House, which has less than two weeks to approve it before the end of session.

If it passes both chambers, leaders in the House and Senate have to sign the measure before it can head to the governor's desk, and Senate leaders have discussed withholding bills from the governor while he faces multiple investigations. They have until May 30 to sign and send bills over.

The governor's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding whether Greitens was open to signing the bill regarding sexual images.