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## **Nixon Signs Bill to Limit Missouri Cities' Profit From Fines.**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon on Friday signed legislation he touted as further limiting cities' ability to profit from traffic tickets and fines, a policy goal that gained traction following the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson.

The measure builds on a law passed last year that caps profits that cities and other municipalities can keep from traffic tickets and court fines. The new law will expand that to include fines from ordinance violations. It takes effect Aug. 28.

The legislation also will lower maximum fines for minor traffic violations from \$300 to \$225. It limits fines for ordinance violations, ranging from at most \$200 for a first offense to \$450 for a fourth offense in a year.

Brown's shooting didn't involve a traffic stop; the black, unarmed 18-year-old was walking in the street when white police Officer Darren Wilson stopped him in August 2014. A U.S. Justice Department investigation cleared Wilson of wrongdoing in Brown's death, and a state grand jury declined to bring charges.

But Brown's death and the sometimes violent protests that followed drew attention to some residents' and legal advocates' concerns about the generally white police force's treatment of those in the predominantly black St. Louis suburb, including the use of police to collect revenue through traffic fines and court fees.

Bill sponsor Sen. Eric Schmitt, a Republican from Glendale, said Missouri residents are concerned with local governments that he described as "shaking down residents, especially poor and disadvantaged citizens."

"It is unconscionable cities would use fine money — whether from traffic tickets or silly violations like the location of one's barbecue grill or the way their blinds are hanging — to prop up bloated bureaucracies," Schmitt said in a statement.

Ferguson Democratic Rep. Courtney Allen Curtis, one of 48 House members to vote against the bill, said in a statement that the black community has been "victimized by these practices for too long." But he said the state needs to help communities grow economic opportunities, which he said would have made cities and towns less reliant on revenue from fines and fees.

He said the bill failed to ban attorneys from also working as judges, a practice he said could lead to conflicts of interest and allowed municipal court issues to go unaddressed.

St. Louis Democratic Rep. Joe Adams also voted against the bill and criticized it as adding to current law, which he said unfairly targets St. Louis County.

Lawmakers last year lowered the percentage of revenue most cities can collect from traffic fines and fees from 30 percent to 20 percent. Any extra money must go to schools, an attempt by lawmakers to take away incentives for local governments to overly rely on ticketing for funding.

Adams and other lawmakers have raised concerns with the lower limit for cities in St. Louis County, which are capped at 12.5 percent. Twelve towns in St. Louis County sued over that provision of the law, which was ruled unconstitutional by a Cole County judge and is in the appeals process.

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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