



# Legislation To Help Prevent Child Sexual Abuse And Grooming Closer To Becoming Law

May 5 2021 10:44 AM

SPRINGFIELD - Two legislative proposals (HB 1975 and HB 3461) aimed at preventing sexual abuse and grooming in schools is closer to becoming law, thanks to the perseverance of State Representative Amy Elik (R-Fosterburg) and her colleagues in the Illinois House of Representatives.

Elik's commitment to stop child sex abuse and grooming are important to her and her family. According to Rep. Elik, "My involvement in the topic of sexual abuse of students by school personnel is in honor of Emilie Morris, my husband's cousin, who was a victim of sexual abuse while in high school in the mid-1990s. The trauma of this abuse by her track coach has been documented in the Oxygen network special "The Case Died With Her" and in a BuzzFeed News story about Emilie's case. After many years of depression, alcoholism and bulimia, Emilie found the strength to go to the police and report this abuse. Sadly she died unexpectedly in 2014 at the age of 35, before the police could proceed with her case, so the charges against her abuser were dropped. Many warning signs were missed or ignored in this case at the school level, and people had suspicions about this abuse and did nothing. Emilie suffered the rest of her life because of this, and her family has not received justice against her abuser."

House Bill 1975 would require several initiatives aimed at addressing sexual abuse and assault in schools. Provides that schools must develop an employee code of conduct spelling out professional boundaries for staff-student relationships to protect students from sexual misconduct and grooming by staff. Violations of the code of conduct as well as failures to report violations would result in disciplinary action. Expands the definition of grooming of a child to include in-person grooming, not just by electronic means as it is currently. Expands aggravated criminal sexual assault to cover abuse if the victim is a student and the accused held a position of trust or authority. This protects students who turn 18 while still in school. Furthermore, requires that schools must

develop a resource guide with sexual abuse response and prevention resources for families, and make it publicly available.

House Bill 3461 would require that by no later than July 1, 2022, a school district shall adopt and implement a policy addressing sexual abuse of children that shall include an age-appropriate and evidence-informed curriculum for students in grades PreK-12. Provides that the sexual abuse policy and any relevant training materials shall include a definition of prohibited grooming behaviors and boundary violations for school personnel and how to report these behaviors. Furthermore, effective upon becoming law, a school district must provide training on child sexual abuse no later than January 31 of each year.

Rep. Elik added, “When I came to the General Assembly, I researched how we could create policy to prevent child sexual abuse from happening, and make no mistake, this is still a problem in schools. Just recently charges were filed against a teacher in Granite City. In a previous General Assembly, the “Make SAFE Task Force” researched policy and ways that these sexual abuse situations in schools could be prevented. After reading the task force recommendations, I filed HB 1887 which includes a recommendation from the Make SAFE task force concerning the definition of grooming of a child. The language in my bill is included in HB1975 that recently passed unanimously out of the House.”

“I am thankful that I was able to work with Democrat Representatives Michelle Mussman and Fred Crespo, the various stakeholders including the Illinois State Board of Education, especially Faith Coulson, who was also a victim and has been a tireless advocate for the prevention of sexual abuse in schools. Every child and teen deserves to be protected from predators, especially those who groom and abuse them in a school setting, which should always be safe for children. These are not harmless “relationships”, this is sexual abuse and the two bills approved by the House aims to prevent this from happening.”