

Gov. Pritzker Signs Law Adding Safeguards to Protect Students Against Sexual Abuse

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Legislation Increases Support for Sexual Abuse Survivors, Expands Training for Educators and Strengthens Codes of Professional Conduct

SPRINGFIELD – Building on previous efforts to support the wellbeing of all students, Governor JB Pritzker signed HB 1975, also known as Faith’s Law, into law. The legislation adds safeguards by expanding the definition of grooming in the criminal code, increasing resources and protections for sexual abuse survivors and their families, and requiring school districts to develop a sexual misconduct code of conduct, review employment history, and increase training for educators.

“Students deserve to be safe in their classrooms, period,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “Anything short of that is a call to action, and Faith’s Law is another critical step in creating and preserving safe and welcoming learning environments for all students. I want to thank Faith Colson for her courage as well as the sponsors Senator Scott Bennett and Representative Michelle Mussman; and their General Assembly colleagues for sending this legislation to my desk on behalf of all of Illinois’ children.”

“Children should be able to turn to their teachers when there’s a problem and trust that their teacher is acting in their best interests,” **said State Senator Scott Bennett (D-Champaign).** “This legislation is a tremendous step forward in ensuring educators are equipped to protect our children from abuse.”

“I thank Governor Pritzker for signing this important piece of legislation that will strengthen the tools schools, parents, and child protection organizations can use to recognize, prevent, and prosecute grooming and inappropriate relationships by school staff members of the students who trust them, which has tragic life-long consequences for these young victims,” **said State Representative Michelle Mussman (D-Schaumburg).**

“I want to thank Governor Pritzker for signing this important legislation, and to acknowledge the diligent efforts of Representative Mussman to pursue the safety of Illinois students,” **said Faith Colson, who the bill is named after.** “My goal in working on this legislation for the past two years has been to prevent other students from having to suffer as I did, and I am hopeful that with these new measures, schools will be safer and futures will be brighter. Protecting children and preventing abuse takes not just emotion but action, and I thank the bystanders who are already taking action and reporting abuse, as well as the many stakeholders and co-sponsors who took action to support this bill, including Chicago CAC, Representatives Elik and Crespo, and many others.”

The legislation closes a prior loophole and expands protections for students by expanding the definition of grooming to include acts performed in-person, through direct communication or a third party, or written communication. Under previous law, grooming only included internet-based communication.

The law requires the Illinois State Board of Education to create a parent resource guide, which would serve as a centralized source of assistance and provide resources available to the parent or guardian of a student who is or may be the victim of sexual abuse. Schools are required to notify parents of the guide at the start of each school year and provide copies to parents by request.

Educators will also receive training on the physical and mental health needs of students, student safety, educator ethics, professional conducts, and other topics regarding students' well-being. This will help teachers and staff identify misconduct while being aware of how to best support students.

School districts are also required to develop an employee code of professional conduct policy that addresses grooming and other forms of sexual misconduct. They are required to post the policy on the school's website and in any handbook provided. A violation of that policy would subject an employee to disciplinary action, including termination of employment.

HB 1975 has various effective dates.