

# Governor Pritzker Signs Lake Michigan Rescue Equipment Act

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CHICAGO — Governor JB Pritzker signed HB4165 into law today, marking the creation of the Lake Michigan Rescue Equipment Act. The act, introduced by Rep. Kelly M. Cassidy (D-Chicago), is a crucial step towards addressing recent drownings in Lake Michigan and preventing future accidents by requiring public rescue equipment on all piers or drop-off points on the lake. The act also lays out new guidelines for reporting drowning events and establishing water safety guidelines.

“The stories of recent drownings on Lake Michigan are both tragic and preventable,” said Governor Pritzker. “This law will protect countless families from experiencing those same terrible losses and ensure a safer Lake Michigan for the thousands of Illinoisans who enjoy it every year.”

The act requires both private and government-owned piers and drop-off points to be outfitted with public rescue equipment such as flotation devices. Beyond requiring easily accessible flotation devices, the act also requires local governments to post warnings in high-incident areas and standardizes reporting of drowning incidents to the Illinois Department of Public Health.

The Lake Michigan Rescue Equipment Act was proposed following the death of 19-year-old Miguel Cisneros, who drowned in Lake Michigan in August of 2021. Cisneros’ family and activists in Rogers Park advocated for increased water safety measures after the tragic accident and several other incidents in the neighborhood in recent years.

2020 was one of the deadliest summers on Lake Michigan in years with 56 drowning deaths recorded, prompting legislators and community groups to advocate for laws like the Lake Michigan Rescue Equipment Act. The Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project, a water safety advocacy group, cites Lake Michigan as the Great Lake with the highest rate of drownings. Drownings often happen quickly and with little noise. Public safety officials recommend using wearable flotation devices, closely monitoring children at play, and assessing weather conditions carefully before swimming.

“Governor Pritzker’s partnership advancing thoughtful and impactful legislation remains a hallmark of his administration,” said State Representative Kelly Cassidy (D-Chicago). “Today’s signing of this community-driven problem-solving initiative continues to illustrate his belief in empowering our communities to seek solutions that work. I’m grateful all to the advocates, especially the Cisneros family, who turned their grief into action and brought us to this day.”

“We have had too many tragic and, in many cases, preventable deaths on Lake Michigan,” said State Senator Robert Peters (D-Chicago). “Simple rescue equipment like lifesavers are an effective way to help people get to safety in case they fall or find themselves struggling in the water.”

"The passage of this law is an example of how democracy should work," said 49<sup>th</sup> Ward Alderman Maria Hadden. "Thank you to the community leaders who implored us to do more to prevent further tragedies at our lakefront. Having this new standard for saving is the right thing to do to save lives."

"This is great progress toward a safer Lake Michigan shoreline, with so many more life rings becoming available," said Jamie Racklyeft, Executive Director, Great Lakes Water Safety Consortium. "This successful bill can now serve as a template for other Great Lakes states, counties, communities, and parks interested in ways to keep their residents and visitors safer around the water.

"In 2018 on a Chicago beach we frantically searched for something that could float while helplessly watching a child fatally submerge and witnessing several would-be-rescuers turn into victims needing rescuing themselves," said Halle Quezada Rasmussen, Founder of Collective Resource Compost. "This weekend, I stood in front of a life ring at that same spot and whispered to the 13-year girl we lost, 'this is for you.' Of course, it is too late for her and I will never stop wishing this could bring her back, but her legacy will live in this law, ensuring that when the unthinkable unfolds, we will have a fighting chance at survival. I am so grateful to everyone who made this progress possible—if we can reduce preventable deaths, we should and now, we are."