

Governor Quinn Signs Major Law to Keep Illinois Children Safe

Written by Erin Wilson
Friday, 25 January 2013 15:41

“Erin’s Law” Helps Prevent Child Sexual Assault and Abuse, Empowers Victims

CHICAGO – January 24, 2013. Governor Pat Quinn today signed a new law requiring schools to implement an age-appropriate sexual assault and abuse awareness and prevention curriculum for grades pre-K through 12. Known as Erin’s Law, House Bill 6913 will help give victims a voice and prevent future incidents of sexual assault and abuse. Today’s action is the latest by Governor Quinn to ensure Illinois children are as protected from harm as possible.

“My most important duty as governor is to make sure every child in Illinois is safe and healthy,” Governor Quinn said. “Sexual assault and abuse steals a child’s innocence and can be extremely psychologically and physically damaging. Erin’s Law empowers young victims and teaches children what kind of behavior is and isn’t ok, which will prevent abuse and protect the children of Illinois.”

Sponsored by Rep. Jerry Mitchell (R-Rock Falls) and Sen. Jacqueline Collins (D-Chicago), HB 6913 – Erin’s Law – was an initiative of Schaumburg, Illinois native Erin Merryn. A victim of sexual assault and abuse as a child, Merryn quit her job three years ago to dedicate her life to helping victims break their silence, educating children about sexual assault and abuse, and preventing them from becoming future victims. She is an author and activist currently working to get Erin’s Law passed in all 50 states.

“My innocence was killed as a child, my trust was taken and my voice was silenced for many years,” said Merryn. “I have reclaimed my voice and I am determined to make sure every child in America has a voice and won’t be silenced by a perpetrator the way I was. After testifying four times at the capital on Erin’s Law, I am overcome with joy to know my voice was heard and Illinois children will now be educated and empowered every year with their voice to protect them from sexual abuse. I’ve turned pain into a purpose to end the silence and to educate and preserve the innocence of children. Thank you Illinois legislators and Governor Quinn for doing right by the children of Illinois.”

Five states have implemented earlier versions of Erin’s Law. Illinois is the first state to take the next step and pass legislation that more comprehensively addresses the need for child sexual assault and abuse education in schools statewide.

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Previously in Illinois, only secondary schools were required to include sexual assault and abuse awareness education. House Bill 6193 expands this requirement to include elementary and middle schools. The law also requires that teachers participate in professional development and training classes that cover sexual assault and abuse.

In 2011, Governor Quinn signed the first step of Erin's Law, which created a task force to examine child sexual assault and abuse research, and release recommendations on how Illinois schools can better inform students about these issues. The Erin's Law Task Force published their recommendations in May 2012. These specific recommendations became House Bill 6913.

The law is effective immediately.

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