

Gov. Daniels signs Lifeline bill into law

Law to shield 911 callers from legal repercussions in certain cases

By Matthew Glowicki | IDS | March 18, 2012

Those who seek medical help for an underage intoxicated friend in the state of Indiana will now be able to receive limited protection under the newly signed Indiana Lifeline Law.

Gov. Mitch Daniels signed the bill into law Friday after the bill passed unanimously in both the Indiana House and Senate. The signing makes Indiana the 12th state to adopt some form of an alcohol-related lifeline law.

Lifeline targets those between 18 and 20 years old who find themselves in an alcohol overconsumption situation. It encourages those people to call emergency personnel for a friend who has drunk too much by protecting them from legal repercussions, though applicable circumstances are limited.

According to the new legislation, law enforcement officers won't be able to take the emergency assistance caller into custody in cases of public intoxication, minor possession, consumption or transportation of alcoholic beverages.

Other, more serious alcohol offenses, such as driving under the influence, are not covered under the law, nor are offenses with other types of drugs.

The law will not protect those who are ill or have overconsumed — only those who call on their behalf.

The IU Student Association joined forces with other Indiana schools, including Purdue University, to help push the bill to the state legislature.

Having worked on the bill, at both the campus and state level, since last spring when the current Big Six administration entered office, the work for IUSA members is now finished.

"It's incredible," IUSA President Justin Kingsolver said. "It's done, and you don't know how long I've been waiting to say that. We are completely done with the process. It's the standing law in the state of Indiana. There are no other hoops we have to jump through."

Sen. Vi Simpson, D-Bloomington, said Lifeline does have the power to save lives.

At the scene of the incident, the law enforcement officer will assess if the caller did actually request emergency medical assistance or did so with another person on behalf of the intoxicated friend.

Full cooperation by the caller with emergency medical assistance personnel and law enforcement officers is also expected. Callers will need to provide the law enforcement officer with any relevant information requested, as well as stay at the scene with the intoxicated individual in need of help until emergency personnel arrive.

Added to the bill during the legislative process was a section protecting law enforcement officers, which states that individuals cannot initiate or maintain an action against an officer due to their compliance or failure of compliance with the law.

Hoosier Youth Advocacy, a nonpartisan student-run organization that aims to involve young Indiana residents in the political process, helped IUSA in its efforts to make Lifeline a reality.

IUSA invested a portion of its resources toward Lifeline efforts, with \$5,000 earmarked for HYA and \$500 allocated just for Lifeline efforts.

Junior Bennett Fuson, HYA director of communications, said engaging students in the legislative process was a personal accomplishment during the process.

“It’s a testament to what most people don’t really assume, that you don’t have to be a politician or an elected official to effect change in your state,” Fuson said. “We’re really proud of the fact that a lot more people are more interested in the political process. Advocacy is something that everyone can do.”

Last fall, IU passed Hoosier P.A.C.T., a University policy that emphasizes education rather than punitive punishments for those involved in alcohol and substance overconsumption.

Purdue also recently adopted a similar medical amnesty policy called Purdue CARES, which shields students from university disciplinary action after seeking medical attention in alcohol-related cases of overconsumption.

And while the law grants protection to emergency assistance callers, Fuson said he believes the law does not encourage student drinking.

"This is not a bill that in any way makes it easier to drink underage," Fuson said. "It makes it easier to help a friend that is ill. The point is to save lives while not facing legal repercussions."

For Kingsolver, the takeaway message for students is to not be afraid to pick up the phone and ask for help.

“It’s most important that students know that they can use it, that there’s no penalty for seeking help,” Kingsolver said. “It’s always the right choice to call for help, to take care of your peers and your friends.”

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