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## Sen. Merritt on the Lifeline Law

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By State Sen. Jim Merritt, R-Indianapolis

As a parent, it's always difficult to say those last goodbyes and send your student off to college for the year. I know the feeling all too well, having experienced it now with each of my three children.

College opens doors for our kids to explore unique opportunities, meet mentors and friends, and test-drive new freedoms. Though it's an exciting time for both you and them, it can also be scary. Our students face real risks, especially when it comes to alcohol and drugs.

According to the Indiana Department of Health, more than two dozen Hoosiers under the age of 21 have lost their lives due to alcohol poisoning since 2004. This statistic scares me every day, and I feel nothing but heart-wrenching pain for the families who are faced with this tragedy.

Binge drinking on college campuses is a rampant and incredibly dangerous trend. Though deterring underage drinking is the best prevention for these alcohol-related deaths, we also need to take common-sense steps to save lives when mistakes are made.

That's why Indiana passed its Lifeline Law in 2012. The Lifeline Law provides immunity for young people who call law enforcement to aid their intoxicated friends in alcohol-related emergencies. Those individuals who call 911, stay with the intoxicated person and cooperate with law enforcement can avoid criminal penalties, even if the callers are intoxicated.

Indiana legislators passed the Lifeline Law, first and foremost, to help save lives due to underage alcohol abuse. No young life should be lost because his or her friends were too scared to call for help. Beyond that, the law codified workable, friendly agreements that already existed between students and local law enforcement.

That being said, the purpose of the Lifeline Law is absolutely not to ease penalties for underage drinkers. Rather, it is to increase awareness about the dangers of underage drinking while saving lives. To achieve that goal, I made sure Indiana's law did not provide legal protection or amnesty to the individual in need of medical attention so as not to give incentive to binge drinking.

Because our law is relatively new, many Hoosiers don't know or fully understand how it works. I urge parents, educators and community members to talk to the young people in their lives about the dangers of alcohol and Indiana's Lifeline Law – it could make the difference in a life-threatening situation.

Though we may not be there every day guiding them in their decisions, parents can take some comfort knowing there are safeguards in place, like the Lifeline Law, to protect our kids.

This fall, I hope every Hoosier college student walks on campus unafraid to make the call and save a life.

If you would like more information on Indiana's Lifeline Law or have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [Senator.Merritt@iga.in.gov](mailto:Senator.Merritt@iga.in.gov) or 317-232-9400.