

Student government initiates statewide initiative

By RACHEL FLORMAN Staff Reporter | Posted: Wednesday, May 2, 2012 10:00 am

Along with protecting minors, the former Purdue Student Government president said the creation of a statewide law set the precedent for future actions.

Brett Highley, a former PSG president, said the efforts of his cabinet to create the Indiana Lifeline Law will encourage his successors to pursue other issues in the same manner.

“Throughout the year, an important mission for (my team) was to leave PSG as good or better than we found it,” Highley said. “By working to get this law passed, it leads the way for those who will lead in the future to deal with issues that we couldn’t foresee.”

The Indiana Lifeline Law, based on the campus policies of several of the state colleges, provides legal immunity from charges such as minor intoxication to those who seek medical attention for a person requiring it for an alcohol related emergency.

The effort was headed by Highley and governmental relations chair David Rosenthal. To promote the law and refine its policies, Highley said he had to work with health policy analysts, Indiana legislators as well as the student associations from Indiana University and the University of Indianapolis. Major legislative supporters included State Sen. Jim Merritt, R-Indianapolis, State Sen. Randy Head, R-Logansport, State Rep. Randy Truitt, R-West Lafayette, and State Rep. Sheila Klinker, D-Lafayette.

Although Highley said legislators were cooperative with the law, the major compromises dealt with who would be protected. The bill originally included some form of immunity for the person requiring medical attention, but this was changed to only cover the caller in order to respect the views and responsibilities of the other stakeholders.

Throughout the process, Rosenthal said the concept of the law was well received, with most challenges revolving around the logistics.

“When we first started we didn’t have a planned law but an idea,” Rosenthal said. “Although people were a little hesitant because they wanted to know the exact language of the law, they liked the concept.”

The law only took 13 months from the first meeting to the time it was signed in as a law. It was passed with a unanimous vote in both the Indiana Senate and House of Representatives, and it will go into effect July 1.

Rosenthal said the most rewarding part of the experience was the chance to see politics in action.

“It was encouraging to see the political process actually work,” Rosenthal said. “I think it also sets the precedent that students can change something on campus and in the state if they take the time and

effort to do so.”

Once the law takes effect, Highley said that his PSG successor, Joe Rust, will be tasked with marketing the law and educating the public about its policies and what it means for minors.

“The law provides legal protection in these situations, but our job is to also emphasize the strong message about what is important in a bad situation,” Highley said. “If you are having doubts about what to do in a bad situation, call for help.”