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NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Governor Blagojevich signs laws to expand protections for elementary and high school students

SB 143, SB 665 and HB 18 will require background checks on new employees, will help fight bullying

SPRINGFIELD– Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today signed legislation aimed at protecting the safety of all Illinois elementary and high school students. The bills will require all non-public schools to perform the same employee criminal background checks that are currently used in public schools; and will help fight bullying by equipping school buses with recording devices, and requiring all of the state’s 873 school districts to develop specific policies on bullying.

“Every student deserves the opportunity to learn in a school environment that is free from the threat of harm,” Governor Blagojevich said. “As leaders, educators and community members, it is our responsibility to see that inside the classroom, our students are safe.”

Senate Bill 143, sponsored by State Senator Jacqueline Collins (D-Chicago) and State Representative James Brosnahan (D-Oak Lawn), requires non-public elementary and secondary schools seeking recognition from the Illinois State Board of Education to conduct a fingerprint-based criminal background check on all new employees. Non-public schools already recognized by ISBE must also conduct the fingerprint-based check on all future employees.

If the check reveals that an applicant has been convicted of a felony in the past seven years or has ever been convicted of sexual or physical abuse of a minor, certain violent crimes, or certain drug offenses, then the school is prohibited from hiring the applicant if it wants to retain its recognition status with ISBE. Schools seeking recognition are also prohibited from hiring anyone registered on the sex offender database. All background requirements also apply to contract employees (bus drivers, custodial workers), who are not directly employed by schools but have daily contact with students.

SB 143 goes into effect immediately.

“When it comes to safety and security for students there should be no difference between public and private schools,” said Rep. Brosnahan. “It only makes sense to even the playing field for all of our students in Illinois, providing our kids with the same protections from predators, regardless of what school they attend.”

House Bill 18, sponsored by State Representative Lou Lang (D-Skokie) and State Senator Kimberly Lightford (D-Westchester), requires each school district to draft and maintain a policy on bullying. The law also requires that the policy be updated every two years and must be on file with ISBE.

Bullying can take many forms such as: hitting or punching; teasing or name-calling; intimidation through gestures or social exclusion; and sending insulting messages by e-mail.

HB 18 becomes effective immediately.

Senate Bill 665, sponsored by State Senator David Koehler (D-Peoria) and State Representative Aaron Schock (R-Peoria), allows schools to equip buses with electronic audio recording devices, in effort to help prevent bullying. Current law allows school districts to install video cameras, but not audio recording equipment.

“This law allows schools and law enforcement to discipline students, conduct investigations, bring civil proceedings or criminally prosecute students by using the confidential recordings,” said Rep. Schock.

SB 665 goes into effect immediately.

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