



**OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
ERIC M. HOFFMAN, PROSECUTOR
46TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
DELAWARE COUNTY, INDIANA**

100 W. MAIN STREET, ROOM 312
MUNCIE, IN 47305

TELEPHONE 765-747-7801
FAX: 765-747-7830

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From: Eric Hoffman, Prosecuting Attorney
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**Victims Protection Legislation Passes Indiana House
*Senate Bill 551 approved 92-4***

Senate Bill 551, authored by Sen. Mark Messmer, R-Jasper, and sponsored by Rep. Wendy McNamara, R-Evansville, cleared the full House of Representatives Tuesday afternoon by a vote of 92 to 4.

With today's passage, SB 551 has now been passed by both the House and the Senate. The bill was approved unanimously by the Senate earlier this session.

"I'm pleased to see this important legislation moving through the General Assembly," Messmer said. "If signed into law, SB 551 would impact every Hoosier community by working to better protect and respect the privacy of victims and ensure offenders are justly punished for their actions."

The bill makes several important changes to Indiana law with regard to victims of crimes, specifically victims of sex crimes. It allows parents to seek a protective order against persons who are making inappropriate contact or contacts with their child after one Indiana mother found herself unable to do anything after an adult sent more than 1,000 text messages to her 14-year-old daughter. SB 551 also plugs a loophole in current law that potentially allows adults to engage in inappropriate sexual relations with a person 13 or 14 years of age.

"This legislation is an important step in protecting victims of child sex crimes and domestic violence from their abusers," McNamara said. "Those facing these dangerous, threatening situations deserve to have their rights protected, and their abusers should receive apt punishment."

"The passage of Senate Bill 551 is a victory for crime victims and other vulnerable Hoosiers and prosecutors are happy to see it has passed both the House and Senate," said David Powell, executive director of the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council. "We would like to thank Sen. Messmer for all his hard work on this bill and Rep. McNamara for sponsoring the legislation in the House. Their leadership was vital to the success of this bill."

SB 551 supports criminal investigations and prosecutions of child abuse cases by restricting disclosure of sensitive information about the child victim and defendant during

the criminal investigation or prosecution of the case. The bill also addresses a gap in the current kidnapping and criminal confinement laws by creating an offense when the kidnapping or criminal confinement results in moderate bodily injury to the victim. Current law only provides for offenses that include “bodily injury” or “serious bodily injury.” The legislation also eliminates the current practice where an offender who is convicted of felony domestic battery has the ability to reduce the penalty to a misdemeanor and it toughens penalties on strangulation charges. The bill includes a provision that changes how victims of crimes are identified, doing away with the use of victim initials in official documents.

Powell also commended the many local prosecutors who worked with lawmakers on the provisions in the bill and came to the Statehouse to testify in support earlier this session.

The bill would also task an interim study committee with looking at the issue of discovery depositions.

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