

Faith's Law to Safeguard Against Sexual Abuse in Schools

On December 3, 2021, Governor Pritzker signed Faith's Law, P.A. 102-0676 (HB 1976), into law. Faith's Law expands the criminal definition of grooming beyond electronic communications to include written communications and acts committed in person or by conduct through a third party. The law also makes it clear that mandated reporters must report suspected grooming to DCFS under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act.

In addition to expanding the criminal definition of grooming, Faith's Law includes several new requirements for schools and educators intended to prevent sexual abuse and misconduct in schools. Faith's Law adds a completely new section to the Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/22-85.5) pertaining to sexual misconduct in schools. This section applies beginning July 1, 2022, and requires all school districts, charter schools, and nonpublic schools to develop an employee code of professional conduct policy that must be made available on the school's website and included in any staff, student, or parent handbook. This employee code of professional conduct policy must address the following:

- Incorporate the Code of Ethics for Illinois Educators;
- Incorporate the statutory definition of "sexual misconduct" in Section 22-85.5;
- Identify expectations for maintaining professional relationships with students and appropriate staff-student boundaries, recognizing the age and developmental level of the students served, and establish guidelines for the following situations: (1) transporting a student, (2) taking or possessing a photo or a video of a student, and (3) meeting with a student or contacting a student outside of the employee's or agent's professional role;
- Reference employee reporting requirements under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act and Title IX; and
- Reference required employee training related to child abuse and educator ethics applicable under State or federal law.

The law specifically provides that any violation of the employee code of professional conduct or failure to report a violation may subject an employee to discipline, up to and including dismissal from employment.

Faith's Law also requires ISBE, by July 1, 2023, to create and post on its website a resource guide that will function as a centralized source of guidance about sexual abuse response and prevention for students, parents/guardians, and educators. Starting at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, school districts must annually notify parents of ISBE's resource guide and provide copies of the guide to parents/guardians upon request or make the guide available on their website.

Need to report a concern or an incident? Call your child's school, state the reason for your call, and speak to the principal or a social worker. Anonymous reports can be made by completing the [Bullying/Incident Reporting Form](#).