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State Representative Harry Benton (97th)

Benton Passes Law to Provide for Children with Disabilities During School Emergencies

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Students with disabilities can expect better planning for their safety in the event of an emergency at school after a new law passed by state Rep. Harry Benton, D-Plainfield became effective last week.

“I came to Springfield to advocate for working families—and some of the hardest working families in our state are those whose children are living with disabilities,” Benton said. “That’s why—especially as the father of a child with an IEP myself—it really upset me when I heard from advocates and constituents that kids with disabilities often aren’t prioritized when an emergency happens at their school. I even heard stories of vulnerable students being forgotten or helped last, and that’s when I knew I had a responsibility to step up.”

Benton, after taking office this year, fought for and passed House Bill 3680, which requires school personnel and administrators throughout the state to ensure that every individualized education plan (IEP) contains a clear plan for how to care for and accommodate that student in various types of emergencies. The plan must address issues such as whether the student can walk, communicate effectively, understand social cues, cope with stress or sensory-intensive environments; and, if not, what the plan is to manage the situation and ensure their safety.

The bill was signed into law by Gov. J.B. Pritzker on June 30, and became effective immediately.

“One of the hallmarks of any just and decent society is that the most vulnerable among the population are looked after and are treated with compassion,” Benton said. “Ensuring that children with disabilities are just as safe as their peers should be—and now, by law, *is*—a top priority for school personnel and administrators. This wasn’t just the compassionate thing to do, it was the right thing to do.”

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