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Sen. Williams' Leadership Helps PA School Districts Stop 'Passing the Trash'

HARRISBURG, Oct. 15, 2014 — Under state Sen. Anthony Hardy Williams' leadership, the House of Representatives today sent legislation to the governor's desk that, if signed into law, would prevent schools from quietly transferring or hiring teachers, coaches and staff who have sexually exploited, abused or harassed students."

House Bill 1816, a proposal that started with Sen. Williams' Senate Bill 46 in January 2013, won the lower chamber's final approval this afternoon, 195-0.

"Too many of our daughters, sons, relatives and neighbors have fallen victim to teachers, coaches and administrators disguised as people our children could trust," Sen. Williams said following the House vote. "We're just one step away from closing a bad loophole in Pennsylvania law that has allowed educators to find employment elsewhere, despite their criminal past."

HB 1816 includes "passing the trash" language from Williams' SB 46, as the senator amended the bill last week to include his proposal and move it to the governor's doorstep.

Williams said school districts will have a much clearer picture of an applicant's past under the new law.

Before a school entity or independent contractor offers employment to someone who will have direct contact with children, they must receive:

- A list, including name, address, telephone number and other relevant contact information of the applicant's
- The applicant's current employer
- All former employers that were school entities
- All former employers where the applicant was employed in positions that involved direct contact with

children

- A written authorization from the applicant's current and former employers

Pertaining to applicants' possible criminal past, the new law would require a written statement highlighting if he or she:

- Has been the subject of an abuse or sexual misconduct investigation by any employer, state licensing agency, law enforcement agency or child protective services agency
- Has ever been disciplined, discharged, non-renewed or asked to resign from employment, resigned from or otherwise separated from any employment while allegations of abuse or sexual misconduct were pending or under investigation
- Has ever had a license, professional license or certificate suspended, surrendered or revoked while allegations of abuse or sexual misconduct were pending or under investigation

"Any teacher, coach or administrator who lies about their past can rest assured that you, one day, will be caught," Williams said. "And, when you are caught and held to public scrutiny, you will lose your job, be denied employment and will be turned over to the police.

"Our children go to school to learn, grow and become productive human beings; the friends, neighbors and community leaders who we look to to lead us forward.

"The adults they entrust to help them get to those pivotal moments in life should never be allowed to walk the halls of our schools and darken the dreams of innocent students.

"This has been a long legislative journey. I am grateful for the help of so many Democrats and Republicans in both chambers to get us to this point, and I am looking forward to Gov. Corbett's consideration and approval of this law so schools everywhere will be able to stop passing the trash," Williams said.

Sen. Williams also thanked the president of the national SESAME group, Terri Miller; teacher abuse survivor and author Andrea Clemens; Dr. Chester Kent, a member of the SESAME Advisory Board and a former western PA school district superintendent; and Lebanon County District Attorney Dave Arnold, the secretary-treasurer the PA District Attorneys Association.

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