

Illinois Law Allows Sharing of Students' Mental Health Information

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By Laura Nightengale, GateHouse Media Illinois

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A central Illinois family's tragedy prompted the creation a new law that will give colleges the ability to share students' mental health information with parents.

It wasn't until after the death of their son, Chris, who was a freshman at Illinois State University last year, that Mike and Kim Predmore of Bartonville learned that Chris had been struggling with mental health issues or contemplating suicide.

"As a parent, my heart breaks for them. A year ago at this time, they were taking their son, Chris, to college for the first time," said state Sen. David Koehler, D-Peoria, who sponsored the legislation in the Senate. "They had no idea that he was having some problems that first semester. It was really not until after he committed suicide that they asked the college, 'Why didn't you let us know that something was going on?'"

The answer was that privacy laws prevented the university from sharing Chris's personal information. College students older than 18 are adults, and their personal and health information is therefore confidential, even to parents.

The Predmores then reached out to state Rep. Dave Leitch, R-Peoria, who sponsored the legislation in the House, asking lawmakers to provide an avenue for families to help struggling students get help before it's too late.

Gov. Bruce Rauner signed the bill into law Wednesday, giving college students the opportunity to authorize a university to share mental health records with parents or a trusted adult. The waiver will be part of the standard paperwork that students fill out when they enroll, which Koehler said gives families the opportunity to discuss mental health early on.

"That's the right time to have this conversation, because you don't want to wait until there's a crisis," Koehler said.

Universities would only be authorized to share information if a student is thought to be a danger to himself or herself or to others.