



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich signs legislation requiring life-saving equipment at outdoor fitness and sports facilities

HB 1279, known as the R.A.W. Initiative, also requires that defibrillator-trained staff be present during all physical fitness activities

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today signed legislation requiring outdoor football stadiums, soccer fields, baseball fields and other outdoor facilities to have an automated external defibrillator (AED) on hand to help save lives in the event of a medical emergency. **House Bill 1279**, sponsored by State Representative Daniel J. Burke (D-Chicago) and State Senator Martin A. Sandoval (D-Cicero), adds outdoor physical fitness and sports facilities to the list of facilities currently required to have defibrillators.

The bill is known as the R.A.W. Initiative, named after Northwestern University football player Rashidi Wheeler who died during practice in 2001. It was determined that if an AED had been onsite, Wheeler’s life could have been saved.

“The death of Rashidi Wheeler was a devastating loss for his family, the community and Northwestern University, and it could have been prevented with a defibrillator. By making defibrillators available at athletic and sporting facilities, we hope to save lives in the future and prevent these kinds of tragedies from happening,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

The bill was championed by Sean Wieber, a former Northwestern University football star and a recent high honors graduate at Chicago-Kent law school. Wieber, currently an associate at Winston Strawn, LLP, was the starting free safety on Northwestern’s 2000 Big Ten Championship football team, and a teammate of Rashidi Wheeler’s. Wheeler died in Wieber’s arms on the practice field on August 3, 2001. The bill grew out of a law school class in legislative advocacy and is the only suggested bill in the history of the class to have been enacted into law.

“Governor Blagojevich’s signing of HB 1279 shows that elected officials throughout Illinois understand the importance of protecting Illinois’ citizens by making AED’s readily available in areas where they can have an immediate impact. I am grateful not only to Gov. Blagojevich, but to the General Assembly, especially Representative Dan Burke, for supporting this initiative. I strongly believe that this new law will save lives, and its mandate--when compared to other states’ laws--puts Illinois in the forefront of AED implementation,” said Sean Wieber.

“Rashidi is smiling from Heaven today! The strength of character demonstrated by Sean Wieber, serves as a testament that the power of love, respect and determination, when accompanied with a desire to do the highest good, is the best recipe for what we, Rashidi’s family, see as a modern day miracle. Sean’s actions, and the signing of House Bill 1279, ensures that his friend’s tragic loss of life is not in vain and ensures that other students and their families will have the opportunity to pursue their dreams in a far safer environment. There are no words to express our gratitude, we are so humbled and comforted in knowing that people like Sean Wieber, still exist in today’s society,” said Linda Will, Rashidi Wheeler’s mother.

When taking action on HB 1279, the Governor used his power of amendatory veto (AV) to change part of the legislation. At the request of the American Red Cross and the American Heart Association, and with full support of the bill’s sponsors, the Governor AV’d the bill to ensure all *indoor and outdoor* park district facilities are covered by the law. As written, the legislation would have exempted outdoor facilities from the obligation to have AED’s on hand. Rep. Burke will file a motion to accept the AV, from which point he and Senate sponsor Martin Sandoval will work their leadership to schedule a vote to accept the AV, thus enacting the law.

“Defibrillators save lives. Having more defibrillators will save more lives. We’re grateful to the Governor for his support on this bill and we are particularly grateful for the change he recommends in his amendatory veto. We hope that this bill can indeed become law in the near future with the General Assembly’s concurrence,” said Mark Peysakhovich, Senior Director of Advocacy, American Heart Association.

“This law will greatly increase the availability of Automated External Defibrillators, which will help save lives,” said Fran Maher, CEO of the American Red Cross of Greater Chicago.

The defibrillator must be stored in an accessible building within 300 feet of the outdoor facility and the building’s entrances must have signs with directions to the AED. If there is not a building within 300 feet, the supervisor of the activity must make sure a defibrillator is available during the event or activity. Physical fitness facilities that are owned or operated by the forest preserve district or conservation district, such as hiking trails in nature preserves, are exempt.

The new law also requires any indoor or outdoor physical fitness facility to ensure a trained AED user is present during all physical fitness activities. Currently the law only requires facilities to have a trained AED user on staff. The Illinois Department of Public Health will adopt rules to encourage coaches, instructors and any other anticipated defibrillator operators to be trained as AED users.

Last summer Gov. Blagojevich signed legislation amending the Emergency Medical Services Systems Act and the Good Samaritan Act so that any person, acting in good faith, who provides emergency medical care involving the use of an AED is not liable for civil damages. This legislation makes it easier for people to provide emergency medical care, and help save lives without fear of retribution.

Every privately owned outdoor physical fitness facility must comply with this bill by July 1, 2009.

Public entities that own four or fewer outdoor physical fitness facilities must comply by:

- July 1, 2009 for the first facility
- July 1, 2010 for the second facility
- July 1, 2011 for the third facility
- July 1, 2012 for the fourth facility

Public entities that own more than four outdoor physical fitness facilities must comply by:

- July 1, 2009 for 25% of those facilities
- July 1, 2010 for 50% of those facilities
- July 1, 2011 for 75% of those facilities
- July 1, 2012 for 100% of those facilities

HB 1279 becomes effective upon acceptance by the General Assembly of the Governor's amendatory veto.

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