



## **Bill would limit disclosure of names of HIV-positive students**

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In Illinois, if you're HIV-positive and attending school, the principal, school nurse, teachers and possibly other school officials are all going to know about it. That stigma is preventing teens from being tested for the disease, according to Ann Hilton Fisher, executive director of the AIDS Legal Council of Chicago.

So, Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, is sponsoring House Bill 4314. It would repeal Illinois' Communicable Disease Prevention Act, which has been in place for more than a decade. The House Human Services Committee Thursday voted 7-1 for the bill, which advances to the House floor.

Under existing law, a school principal may disclose the identity of an HIV-infected child to the school nurse and the student's teachers. A principal also can disclose the student's identity to those persons who, under federal or state law, are required to decide the placement or educational program of the child.

A girl in a suburban Chicago school who had tested positive for the virus that causes AIDS was traumatized last year when a school official told her she could not use the regular girls bathroom when she gets her period, Fisher said. She said the girl was told that her sanitary napkins were infectious waste and that she could only use the bathroom in the nurse's office.

"Whether people believe it or not, when the confidential trust of privacy is broken, a high rate of emotional distress can occur in an HIV-positive child," said Linda Coon, an attorney and director of Families' and Children's AIDS Network, reading a letter that several teens in a Chicago HIV support group wrote to the committee.

"When a student's trust is broken, it brings thoughts of fear, suicide, anger and even public humiliation and victimization by both peers and the community at large."

Barb Germann, health services coordinator for the Springfield School District, said she is unaware of any student in the district that is currently HIV-positive.

"I have been a school nurse for 20 years, and I know of two students who were HIV-positive, and neither of them attends the schools now," Germann said.

Dennis Canny, the principal at Rochester High School, said no students there have reported being HIV-positive.

Although central Illinois does not have a lot of HIV-positive students, “People are very interested in talking about somebody else’s HIV status,” Fisher said. “Discrimination is real.”

Cathy Krieger, president and CEO of the Children’s Place Association in Chicago, said students are avoiding being tested for HIV because they fear that the test results would be made public or presented to their school principals, and then other people would find out about them.

Cheryl Ward, surveillance program administrator for the HIV/AIDS section of the Illinois Department of Public Health, said there was a 100 percent increase in positive tests for males 24 and under from 2000 to 2006. There was a 52 percent increase overall in HIV cases among youth 24 and younger.

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