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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**IPAC Applauds Passage of Victims Protection Legislation**  
*Senate Bill 551 clears Senate committee unanimously*

(INDIANAPOLIS – February 5, 2019) – Senate Bill 551, authored by Sen. Mark Messmer, R-Jasper, passed unanimously out of committee today by a vote of 7-0. The bill greatly expands the rights of crime victims in Indiana, especially domestic violence and child victims. The bill adds protections for the community against sex offenders who improperly register or fail to register on the sex offender or violent offender registry, allows for child victims to bring a comfort item or specially trained comfort animal with them to court during testimony and includes an enhancement for domestic battery if the convicted person has a prior conviction of strangulation, among many other needed fixes to Indiana code to support the plight of crime victims in the Hoosier state.

The bill supports criminal investigations and prosecutions of child abuse cases by restricting disclosure of sensitive information about the child victim and defendant during the criminal investigation or prosecution of the case. It allows parents to seek a protective order against persons who are making inappropriate contact or contacts with their child. SB 551 also plugs a loophole in current law that potentially allows adults to engage in inappropriate sexual relations with a person 13 or 14 years of age. Finally, the bill addresses a gap in the current kidnapping and criminal confinement laws by creating an offense when the kidnapping or criminal confinement results in moderate bodily injury to the victim. Current law only provides for offenses that include “bodily injury” or “serious bodily injury.” The legislation also eliminates the current practice where an offender who is convicted of felony domestic battery has the ability to reduce the penalty to a misdemeanor.

“We’re pleased with the passage of Senate Bill 551 and we thank Sen. Messmer for his work on this important piece of legislation, as well as the work of Chairman Mike Young and the members of the Senate Corrections and Criminal Law Committee,” Dave Powell, executive director of IPAC, said. “The bill involved a lot of hard work but this is something that is needed in Indiana.”

Also testifying in support of the bill last week was Clark County Prosecutor Jeremy Mull. Prosecutors all across Indiana work with victims of life-altering crimes and their families on a daily basis. Prosecutor Mull and prosecutors throughout the state are eager to stand with legislators this session to support measures that help victims and their families.

The bill would also task an interim study committee with looking at the issue of discovery depositions.

After unanimous passage out of committee, SB 551 will now go to the full Senate for further consideration.

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