



ASSOCIATION OF INDIANA PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS, INC.

Indianapolis, IN 46204-2767

Phone: (317) 232-1836

Fax: (317) 233-3599



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
Connie Smith, Public Affairs Officer
317-232-1836

Legislators Provide Leadership to Tackle Heroin Epidemic, Pharmacy Robbery Phenomenon

Prosecutors support passage of SB 324

INDIANAPOLIS (March 30, 2017) – Indiana prosecutors applaud the leadership of Indiana legislators in efforts to mount an all-encompassing response to the heroin epidemic and scourge of pharmacy robberies currently sweeping Indiana and other parts of the U.S. Thanked specifically for their efforts to fight heroin dealing and pharmacy robberies were **Senators Erin Houchin, Michael Young (co-sponsor) and Eric Koch (co-sponsor)**, as well as **Representatives Gregory Steuerwald and Sharon Negele**.

The passage of Senate Bill 324 Wednesday afternoon, March 29, in the House Courts and Criminal Code Committee enhances sentencing for heroin dealers by allowing law enforcement and prosecutors to aggregate multiple drug sales within a 90-day period that reach a certain total weight. The bill also makes dealing in heroin a non-suspendible Level 2 or Level 3 felony if the person has a prior felony conviction. The bill also addresses pharmacy robberies, making the theft of a controlled substance from a pharmacist acting in their official capacity a Level 4 felony. With aggravating circumstances of using a deadly weapon or causing bodily injury, the charge becomes a Level 2 Felony. Causing serious bodily injury during a pharmacy robbery calls for a Level 1 Felony charge.

Tippecanoe County Prosecutor Patrick Harrington who testified in support of the bill said, “Sen. Houchin, Rep. Steuerwald and Rep. Negele’s actions support punitive measures against heroin dealers who are profiting from the death and misery suffered by heroin addicts and their families, attack this epidemic by interrupting the supply chain, and remove the preferential sentence leniency drug dealers have enjoyed from Indiana’s sentencing statutes. Because certain controlled substances are a gateway to heroin, we also commend the legislators for targeting the issue of pharmacy robberies in the state.”



Patrick
Harrington

Sen. Houchin explained the need for tightening penalties for heroin dealers in SB 324: “Addressing the devastating heroin epidemic that is attacking our communities will take a multi-faceted approach,” she said. “Heroin dealers have found a loophole in our laws that helps them avoid harsher sentencing for their crimes. This bill would close that loophole, allowing law enforcement and prosecutors to cut the opioid epidemic off at its source.”

House sponsor **Rep. Steuerwald** said "Continuing to find ways to address the heroin and opioid epidemic that has plagued Hoosier families and communities is an important part of the General Assembly's work

this session. This bill strengthens Indiana's commitment to combating heroin use by ensuring those with prior felonies receive harsher penalties. Additionally, the bill aims to keep pharmacy patrons and staff safe by discouraging pharmacy robberies, which have surged in recent years."

Rep. Negele sponsored an amendment that added greater penalties for pharmacy robberies and explained: "With Indiana's growing drug epidemic, it's important the General Assembly takes steps to target dealers and keep illegal prescription drugs off our streets. By increasing penalties for drug store robberies, we can better protect pharmacy staff while working to reduce the number of thefts and violent acts involved."

In regards to the bill's targeting of heroin dealing, **Association of Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Executive Secretary David Powell** said, "The unintended consequences of legislation in recent years has been to exempt heroin dealers from penalties imposed upon other serious felons in Indiana. That loophole has been closed with the elimination of suspended sentences for heroin dealers who have a previous felony conviction. This new legislation gives drug investigators the ability to collect evidence for use in a criminal case over a period of 90 days." The length of time for drug investigators to build a case is important because the business model for many heroin dealers is to sell small quantities to addicts over multiple instances.



David Powell

"At the start of the 2017 session of the Indiana General Assembly, it was the goal of Indiana prosecuting attorneys to decrease the supply of heroin and other illegal drugs by closing loopholes that benefitted heroin dealers. It is also time that Indiana's dubious distinction of leading the nation in pharmacy robberies be dealt with through charges more reflective of the gravity of the crime. The support of Sen. Houchin and Reps. Steuerwald and Negele has helped prosecutors to achieve that goal," **noted Prosecutor Harrington.**

END

For photos of Indiana legislators follow these links:

[Sen. Erin Houchin](#)

[Rep. Gregory Steuerwald](#)

[Rep. Sharon Negele](#)