



Illinois Legislative News

GOP lawmakers back effort to give DCFS workers pepper spray

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Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD – Republican lawmakers are calling for the passage of legislation that would allow Department of Children and Family Services workers to carry pepper spray for self-defense when investigating allegations of child abuse.

This comes weeks after the death of DCFS investigator Deidre Silas, who died while checking the welfare of six children at a home in Thayer in rural Sangamon County. Benjamin Reed, 32, was charged with first-degree murder in connection with her death.

“It is legal for people to carry pepper spray for their own protection, as many do all over this state. Yet, DCFS workers who have to walk into abusive homes are not allowed that same protection,” Sen. Steve McClure, R-Springfield, the sponsor of Senate Bill 4165, said at a news conference. “This is a commonsense step to help them stay safe while performing what is an incredibly important job.”

Rep. Sandy Hamilton, R-Springfield, filed House Bill 5688 that would allow the DCFS employees to carry mace or pepper spray on the job, also requiring them to complete a training program from the Illinois State Police on the proper use of pepper spray.

“This bill provides a safety tool not currently available to DCFS frontline staff, should they encounter dangerous and possibly life-threatening situations while doing their job,” said retired DCFS worker

Gayle Hopper, who attended a February news conference unveiling the legislation.

McClure said he believes the bill will receive bipartisan support.

McClure is also a cosponsor on a bill to increase criminal penalties for attacking a DCFS worker. Gov. JB Pritzker has endorsed that effort. Similar efforts failed in 2019 after the death of DCFS worker Pam Knight, who was fatally assaulted during a child protection call in Milledgeville in northwest Illinois.

Rep. Tony McCombie, R-Savanna, also introduced House Bill 3646 that will allow DCFS caseworkers to carry a concealed handgun during the performance of their official duties.

Since 2017, there have been more than 2.5 million visits to homes and 20 documented incidents where a worker was threatened or assaulted, and all of those incidents were reported to local law enforcement, according to information provided by DCFS last month.

DCFS investigators must complete a six-week training that includes worker safety and within the first 90 days of employment must complete workplace and field safety training. In addition, after Knight’s death, Illinois State Police conducted training for DCFS, covering topics such as de-escalation, active shooter response and situational awareness.

Under current rules, an employee should call for law enforcement or take another DCFS worker with them on a call that involves:

A documented history of vio-



Sen. Steve McClure, R-Springfield, speaks at a news conference unveiling a bill that would allow DCFS workers to carry mace. (Credit: Blueroomstream.com)

lence, including assault convictions or weapons violations.

A document or alleged history of criminal activity.

Taking a child into protective custody.

A report that alleges that the person being investigated is dangerous or known for potential violence.

During the news conference, McClure said mace or pepper spray might just give a DCFS investigator the few seconds they need to get away from a violent attack.

When asked if adding pepper spray into a situation with children alleged to be abused or neglected could escalate the situation, McClure responded that the pepper spray was to be used for

self-defense and training provided by the Illinois State Police would be key.

“It’s sad that we have to make a law for our state workers to be able to protect themselves,” Hamilton said. “It is the right thing to do, so that those who are working to protect abused children can also have at least one tool to protect themselves in these situations.”

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Is the Land of Lincoln becoming the Silicon Valley of electric vehicles?

This story was provided by Intersect Illinois and was written by Nicole Cornett for Expansion Solutions Magazine. Intersect Illinois helps companies and communities navigate the site selection process in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and others. Intersect Illinois generated nearly 60 business attraction and expansion projects in 2020.

In 2016, Rivian was a little-known tech company when its founder visited Normal, Ill., to look at purchasing equipment from a shuttered Mitsubishi factory. Rather than simply purchasing the equipment, he noticed the promise of Normal and the company ended up taking over the entire plant, continuing to expand, and receiving backing from investors including Amazon, Ford and Cox Automotive. Rivian’s first electric truck rolled off its only assembly line in Normal in September of 2021, and the company went public in November. Its R1T is said to define what modern pickup truck can be and was honored with Motor Trend’s prestigious 2022 Truck of the Year. By choosing to manufacture its electric trucks in Normal, Rivian has had a tremendous impact on the community and the state. It is currently one of McClean County’s largest employers, responsible for 3,700 jobs.

Rivian is one piece of the growing EV industry’s presence in Illinois and testament to the importance of the State’s efforts to advance the industry. In October 2021, Illinois passed the Reimagining Electric Vehicles Act (REV) into law, providing significant incentives that make Illinois a premier location for EV related companies looking to grow. These include:

- Income tax withholding equal to 75% for new employees (100% in



An electric vehicle charging station in Illinois. In October, Illinois passed the Reimagining Electric Vehicles Act into law, providing significant incentives that help make Illinois attractive to EV-related companies looking to grow.

underserved or energy transition areas)

- Credits for education and vocational training
- Tax exemptions for building materials and utilities
- Capital expenditure credits for EV and battery facilities

Additionally, just before that, in September of 2021, Gov. JB Pritzker signed the historic Climate and Equitable Jobs Act into law, putting Illinois on the path to 100% clean energy. The act encourages the industry and its suppliers to invest throughout the state and advances the State’s goal of becoming a top global destination for EV manufacturing.

James Chen, vice president for public policy at Rivian, noted the importance of creating a business-friendly atmosphere in order to attract a robust supply chain for

the EV industry. “This will lead to a greater investment in the state, increased jobs and the growth of Illinois’ industrial base in electric vehicle technology, supporting Illinois’ goal of becoming the Silicon Valley of electric vehicles,” Chen said.

The growing EV ecosystem, along with the state’s central location, access to talent and commitment to a sustainable future are all reasons Lion Electric, a Canadian manufacturer of electric busses, recently chose Joliet, Illinois for its first U.S. manufacturing facility.

“Lion is the leader in electric school buses and has always been dedicated to the U.S. market, and our commitment to be close to our customers is one of the core values we have as a company. This significant expansion into the U.S. market will not only allow us to drasti-

cally increase our overall manufacturing capacity of electric trucks and buses but to also better serve our customers, while adding critical clean manufacturing jobs that will form the backbone of the green economy,” said Marc Bedard, CEO and founder of Lion.

Lion invested \$70M in the largest all-electric commercial vehicle production plant in the U.S., where it will employ more than 700 people. The new facility will represent the largest dedicated production site for zero-emission medium and heavy-duty vehicles in the U.S. and Lion’s biggest footprint in the market. The Illinois plant will give the company the ability to meet the increasing demand in the marketplace for “Made in America” zero-emission vehicles, while simultaneously bringing production closer to its customers.

One way the State is strengthening its position as a premier location for the EV industry is by building the workforce of the future through initiatives such as Manufacturing Training Academies. The program awarded \$7.5 million to Normal’s Heartland Community College to train electric vehicle technicians for skilled Rivian positions. Programs like this are being developed throughout the state. In another example, Illinois State University (also located in Normal), is planning to invest \$44 million to launch an engineering school which will provide Rivian and its suppliers with the needed labor force.

In nearby Champaign, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign houses one of the world’s top engineering schools. In 2020, the U of I System’s computer science, computer engineering and data science programs graduated more than 3,400 students.