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Governor signs bills that help law enforcement build cases

(Indianapolis – June 1, 2017) - Indiana prosecutors participated today in the signing by Governor Eric Holcomb of two bills that are considered essential to law enforcement's ability to build criminal cases for conviction of wrongdoers.

SEA 322 requires every person arrested for a felony to submit a DNA sample. DNA collection is a powerful criminal justice tool that can exonerate the innocent and provide identification of the guilty. A long list of sponsors supported the bill, including Sen. Erin Houchin, Rep. Wendy McNamara, Rep. Patrick Bauer, Sen. Randy Head, Rep. Donna Schaibley and Sen. Jack Sandlin.

Boone County Prosecutor Todd Meyer said, "Taking DNA samples of convicted felons has proved effective in solving crime and making our Indiana communities safer as a result. Indiana implemented this measure almost 11 years ago. It was the right thing to do then and the right thing to do now is the passage of this legislation that authorizes law enforcement to take a DNA sample from a felony offender at the time of his arrest. This tool has already proven itself to be effective in solving crime in this state." (Note: A criminal charge is merely an accusation. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.)

HEA 1406 takes a huge step toward heightened enforcement of drug suppliers and Indiana prosecutors have long advocated for a three-pronged approach to attack the drug epidemic that includes prevention, treatment and enforcement.

Bill sponsors who participated in today's signing were Sen. Erin Houchin, Sen. Eric Koch and Rep. Tom Washburne. The new law 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 said, "Signing of this bill supports 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 sponsoring legislators for targeting the issue of pharmacy robberies in the state."

END