

## Governor McCrory Signs Burt's Law

Raleigh, N.C.

May 26, 2015

Governor Pat McCrory signed Senate Bill 445, also known as Burt's Law, into law today. The governor signed the bill at a ceremony with Burt Powell, his parents, Laurie and Tom Powell, bill sponsors and Lt. Governor Dan Forest.

"It is our responsibility to protect those who cannot defend themselves," Governor McCrory said. "What happened to Burt is heartbreaking, but because of his bravery, Burt's Law will work to ensure the safety of group home residents in the future."

The law is named after Burt Powell, a 37-year-old special needs patient who was sexually abused over the course of a year by an elderly male staff member at a Conover group home where he resided. The offender threatened to hurt victims' families if the abuse was reported. Workers at the home knew about the abuse but did not report it because their jobs were threatened. Burt described the abuse to his mother who wanted to take it to court, but the suspect died from a heart attack just days before Burt was scheduled to tell his story to the police. Burt's parents pursued this law to protect others and keep group homes safe.

Burt's Law requires any person, either staff member or volunteer, who witnesses a group home resident being sexually assaulted to report the offense to the local Department of Social Services, law enforcement and the District Attorney. Failure to do so within 24 hours will result in a Class A1 misdemeanor. The law also increases the penalty for those who intentionally injure special needs adults at a facility.

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