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Good Samaritan law will save lives

New Jersey just became the 12th state in the country to enact a good Samaritan law. This law, known officially as the Good Samaritan Emergency Response Act, encourages anyone who is with someone overdosing on drugs to call for emergency care without facing criminal charges, probation or parole violations.

Drug overdose is one of the leading causes of accidental death in New Jersey. While these deaths are preventable, the majority of overdose victims do not actually die until several hours after they have taken a drug. Oftentimes, drug overdoses go unreported or untreated, for fear that individuals involved would be prosecuted or face some other legal repercussions.

These good-Samaritan-type laws do not protect people from arrest for other offenses, such as selling or trafficking drugs or driving while intoxicated or under the influence. Instead, these policies protect only the caller and overdose victim from arrest and/or prosecution for simple drug possession, possession of paraphernalia and/or being under the influence.

It's more important to take immediate action to save the life of the overdose victim than to prosecute the individuals who may have been with the victim at the time of the overdose. As family law attorneys in Bergen County, we have seen far too many families destroyed by drug abuse. As recently reported in *The Record*, the increase of heroin use among teenagers and young adults in northern New Jersey has been alarming – and passing this legislation couldn't have come at a better time.

If the good Samaritan law saves one person's life because a bystander was called for emergency help without the fear of legal repercussions, it was well worth the arduous legislative effort.

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Englewood Cliffs, June 5

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