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Bill signed into law

By **TANIAH TUDOR, Press Argus-Courier Staff**

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An Arkansas bill named after an Alma High School student was signed into law this week.

Arkansas House Bill 1941 named for 16-year-old Colin Keady was signed into law by Gov. Asa Hutchinson on Tuesday, April 18. The act amends Arkansas Code 4-27-201 to allow the incorporator of a corporation to be as young as 16.

Two things motivated Keady to try to get the law changed he said. The first was a class assignment, the second was his own blocked attempt to start a business.

About a year ago, Keady was blocked from getting his sales tax number after attempting to open a business account at Arvest Bank for his primate-themed graphic T-shirt company Katonga Kollektion, he said.

“That’s when the first red flag was raised that I wasn’t allowed to be on a business license,” Keady said.

After contacting the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration, Keady learned that because of his age he could not be named as the owner of a business.

It was a disappointment, but it was not until The Indifference Project - a class project prepared by Keady’s 10th grade English teacher Michael Hensley - that Keady took action to change the law.

Hensley was inspired by a speech by Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, Nobel Laureate and author of the book “Night,” who said that man’s greatest enemy is indifference, Hensley said.

“I’m of the belief that we have a generation of kids that are ready and willing to change the world if we just give them the tools and resources to do it,” Hensley said.

As part of The Indifference Project, students choose a relevant issue that they care about, and through research and action try to bring about change on that issue, Hensley said.

“We had to find an issue we can no longer be indifferent about,” Keady said. “We write about it, research and then we formulate an action ... to see how much we could do to try to solve it.”

Students fulfilled their major writing requirements through the project, Hensley said.

“Our ability to read, write and communicate is not limited to Shakespeare,” Hensley said.

Keady had first chosen another topic to fulfill the assignment, but after hearing about his difficulty in starting a business, Hensley suggested he tackle that issue instead.

Keady agreed that it was a topic about which he was more passionate, he said.

“At the age of 16, the state allows you to father a child, become legally married and become emancipated from your parents,” Keady said. “I feel like all three of those are harder than owning your own business. I’ve always wanted to own my own business and felt ... I was responsible enough to do that.”

After doing some research, Keady asked State Rep. Charlotte Douglas to help with his project, he said.

Douglas agreed with Keady that there was a need for the law to change, she said, and feels it is important to encourage rather than stifle young entrepreneurs who often have fresh ideas.

“This brought a lot of attention to young entrepreneurs,” Douglas said.

“Someone who might have been thinking they’re too young to start a business, this could give them the jump start they need.”

Kevin Niehaus with the Arkansas Secretary of State’s Office helped write the bill, Keady said, and Douglas sponsored and filed the bill.

After passing through multiple committees and being passed in both the House and the Senate, the bill was signed into law by the governor.

Hensley called Keady's project the "perfect example" of a relevant issue whose resolution was achieved by giving him the resources he needed.

Keady called himself "lucky" because he was one of the students who was able to take action on his issue.

There remain restrictions in the law. Those under 18 looking to start a business must still have someone 21 or older to cosign on the corporation. This is to provide for a separate law that states people under a certain age cannot be sued, Douglas said.

"More than anything, I hope it shows young people they can make a difference in lawmaking," Douglas said. "Whatever their issue is, they need not be afraid to contact their legislator."