

Prescription database proposal aimed at preventing abuse

By Rep. Butch Parrish

The Georgia House of Representatives voted March 31 to approve legislation that would establish an electronic database to monitor the dispensing of prescription pain killers that include controlled substances.

Currently, Georgia physicians do not have information available to know if their patients are obtaining similar prescriptions from other doctors. This potentially enables patients to pursue multiple prescriptions for similar medications from different doctors. This problem not only results in abuse of these medications that results in patient overdoses, but it also results in some patients abusing the system so that they can illegally sell the addictive medications on the street.

SB 36 would give doctors and pharmacists the tools they need to stop the abuse by creating an electronic database of the prescribing and dispensing of Schedule II, III, IV, and V controlled substances in Georgia. This information is already recorded by the Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, which receives all prescriptions once they are filled by pharmacists. SB 36 would simply allow that information to be put into a database that will only be accessible by doctors and pharmacists who would have to use a secure password. As a result, doctors and pharmacists will be better able to identify prescription drug abusers. In turn, abusers will be able to get the help they need and prescription drugs will have less of a chance to end up in the wrong hands with potentially dangerous outcomes.

SB 36 also targets “pill mills” that provide prescriptions for some widely abused drugs, providing a system to prevent illegal activity. Approximately 40 states, including all states bordering Georgia, have such databases in place now. The measure goes back to the Senate for consideration of House changes.

Session Schedule: The 2011 session of the Georgia General Assembly is now down to its final three legislative days. Due to a schedule change, lawmakers were not in session on April 1. The session will resume Monday, April 11, for Day 38, followed by Day 39 on April 12 and the 40th and final day on April 14. Proposed tax reform legislation is still a work in progress in the Special Joint Committee on Georgia Revenue Structure and will not be presented to the full House of Representatives and Senate until the final three days of the session. Also awaiting final action is the Sunday alcohol sales legislation, SB 10, which has passed the Senate and gone through the committee process in the House but has not reached the House floor for a vote.

Private Reservoirs: A majority of House members voted March 30 to approve legislation that would allow private developers to build reservoirs and other water infrastructure projects for local governments and water utilities. The 92-68 vote in favor was only one more than the 91 votes required

for passage. Supporters of SB 122 said the measure would give officials at the local level another tool to finance projects to help meet water needs in their communities. The Senate voted March 31 to agree with House changes to SB 122, sending it to the Governor for his signature.

Insurance Mandates: The House approved amended legislation that would establish an advisory commission to review and evaluate the effectiveness and financial impact of medical tests and procedures that state law mandates must be covered by health insurance policies. SB 17 now goes back to the Senate for consideration of House changes to the bill.

Comprehensive Planning: House members voted March 30 to approve legislation that would remove the current requirement for local governments to submit comprehensive plans for land use to the state government. Submitting such plans would be voluntary under SB 86, which now goes back to the Senate for consideration of House changes.

Child Restraint: The House voted March 30 in favor of legislation that would increase the maximum age that children are required to ride in car safety seats from 6 to 8 years. SB 88 would require the use of a child booster seat up to age 8, with an exemption for children who are taller than 4 feet, 9 inches. Similar legislation has also passed in the House of Representatives. SB 88 now goes to the Governor for his signature.

Senate Action: Last week, the Senate gave final approval to two bills that I co-sponsored in the House, sending them to the Governor for his signature. HB 199 would add certain chemicals used to manufacture bath salts to the state's list of controlled substances, and HB 214 would establish a new state Department of Public Health.

Other Legislation: Also last week, the House gave its approval to SB 214, which would make it illegal to provide an inmate with a wireless handset; SB 251, which would change the renewal period for insurance licenses from annual to biennial; SR 30, which would require all Municipal Court judges in Georgia to be attorneys; SR 312, which supports the deepening of the Savannah Harbor; HR 341, which promotes increased public awareness about the dangers of firing a weapon into the air during a celebration; and HR 424, which urges the state Department of Natural Resources and other entities to study the feasibility of withdrawing, storing and distributing water from the Tennessee River Basin to enhance Georgia's water supply.

General Assembly Online: Throughout the session, you can read the details and check the status of legislation and watch live broadcasts of House and Senate proceedings online at www.legis.ga.gov.

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