



CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

Seeking Justice for All

Bill to reduce “doctor shopping” clears final big hurdle, wins broad bipartisan support in California Assembly

SB 482, backed by a broad coalition that includes Consumer Attorneys, will help address the alarming prescription drug abuse epidemic

SACRAMENTO (August 24, 2016) – The state Assembly voted 80-0 today to approve a Consumer Attorneys of California-sponsored bill to reduce dangerous “doctor shopping” in California and save lives by helping to curb the nationwide epidemic of prescription painkiller abuse.

SB 482, authored by Sen. Ricardo Lara (D-Bell Gardens), will require physicians to check the state’s existing CURES database of prescriptions before prescribing potentially-addictive Schedule II, Schedule III or Schedule IV narcotics to a patient for the first time. If treatment continues, additional checks of the database will be required every four months.

“It’s hard to fathom, but prescription drug abuse is the most significant preventable health crisis of this generation,” said Consumer Attorneys of California president Elise Sanguinetti. “SB 482 will make a difference. By requiring doctors to check the database, it will put a big dent in this terrible epidemic.”

SB 482 has a broad range of support, including the California Narcotic Officers Association (co-sponsor), the national drug control group Shatterproof, the Medical Board of California, California Chamber of Commerce, Consumer Federation of California, the California Police Chiefs Association, the American Insurance Association and Small Business California. The editorial boards of the Los Angeles Times, Sacramento Bee and East Bay Times also support the bill.

“SB 482 is a good first step in tackling California's opioid epidemic,” said Gary Mendell, founder and CEO of Shatterproof, a national non-profit dedicated to reducing the devastation addiction causes to families and the unjust stigma associated with this disease. “I hope other states look at the progress we have made in California this year, and are inspired to pass additional legislation to protect the safety and health of our citizens nationwide.”

The legislation overcame stubborn resistance from the California Medical Assn., which only in recent weeks dropped its opposition to bill’s goal of requiring that doctors check the state drug database to curb the abuse crisis and prevent prescription tragedies.

“I’m so happy this important bill has passed. It will save lives by reducing prescription drug abuse,” said Bob Pack, who has worked for more than a decade to promote and secure funding for CURES. “It’s good to see that the medical community has turned the corner and now understands the value of this tool. It will allow every doctor in California access to the information they need to safely prescribe potentially addictive drugs.”

Pack in 2012 worked with former state Sen. Mark DeSaulnier to push through legislation that providing funding to expand the CURES database and make it accessible in real-time online. That bill also included a requirement that doctors check the database before writing a prescription for a potentially addictive painkiller, but the provision was stripped out due to opposition from the California Medical Assn. and health care industry.

Bob Pack and the Consumer Attorneys of California have been working ever since to push through the database-check requirement, including a failed ballot measure in 2014 that included the provision and now SB 482, which Sen. Lara introduced in early 2015.

Some two dozen states already require doctors to check similar databases, and incidents of “doctor shopping” for multiple prescriptions have been reduced in those states by as much as 75 percent. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are among the many experts calling for mandatory use of prescription databases.

Since July 1, California prescribers have been required to register to use the CURES database, but there is no requirement to actually consult the database before prescribing. By checking the database, doctors can verify that patients are not already receiving the drugs from another provider.

In addition to the lives saved by cutting the incidence of addiction, SB 482 could potentially result in huge cost savings for the state by cutting down on health care costs and emergency responses in dealing with overdose deaths and other devastating societal costs caused by the current opioid epidemic.

SB 482 was approved by the California Senate in May 2015 with bipartisan support. The bill will now head back to the full Senate, where approval is expected on several non-controversial amendments passed in the Assembly. Once approved, it would go to the desk of Gov. Jerry Brown, who is expected to sign it.

Consumer Attorneys of California is a professional organization of plaintiffs' attorneys representing consumers seeking accountability against wrongdoers in cases involving personal injury, product liability, environmental degradation and other causes.

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