

Pharmacists would decide under new proposal to curb meth

January 22 2016, by Aric Chokey

Pharmacists could require customers they suspect of making methamphetamine to present a prescription when they attempt to buy medicine containing a key ingredient for the drug, under a compromise bill proposed in the Indiana House.

Republican Rep. Ben Smaltz of Auburn originally wanted to require a prescription for all sales of pseudoephedrine—often found in cold medicine—but decided to scale the measure back after skepticism from House Public Health Committee chairwoman Cindy Kirchhofer.

Oregon and Mississippi are the only two states to require a prescription for all pseudoephedrine sales although many other states have attempted to pass similar legislation.

Indiana has led the nation in meth lab seizures for the last three years.

The prescription requirement has been considered several times in Indiana to combat the trend but foundered amid fierce debate between pharmaceutical companies and [law enforcement organizations](#).

The Consumer Healthcare Products Association, which represents drug companies that would lose money from a decline in medicine sales, recently ran radio ads warning of the inconvenience of prescriptions to customers and potential rise in Medicare and Medicaid costs.

But the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council, a longtime advocate for

tighter pseudoephedrine regulations and prescriptions, says there are plenty of other medicine options that people could use that don't contain pseudoephedrine.

Aside from Smaltz's plan, lawmakers in both chambers have proposed a number of bills including regulating medicine sales, raising the consequences for offenders and giving funds to people who clean up the mess that meth cooks leave behind.

Kirchhofer said she's heard a wide range of opinions on these options from her peers, but her district mostly opposes the prescription measure.

"It's a hard sell for me in my community," Kirchhofer said. "There are many people who say not to restrict this for law-abiding citizens, and I tend to agree. But I want everybody to have their day in court and discuss it."

Kirchhofer's district is a part of Marion County, the same county as Indianapolis and the most populous in the state. It has only had 39 meth lab seizures since 2007, according to reports from the Indiana State Police. It has consistently been on the low end of county ranks for seizures for several years.

On the other hand, Delaware County in east central Indiana has held the No. 1 position for meth lab seizures in the state for a few years and has had 477 since 2007. State police reported 148 seizures in 2014 while the second-place county had only 58. Numbers for 2015 have not yet been released.

Reps. Sue Errington, D-Muncie, and Melanie Wright, D-Yorktown, and Kevin Mahan, R-Hartford City, have districts running through Delaware County and have taken little action on the issue in the past.

Jeff Arnold, prosecuting attorney for Delaware County and board member for state association, said while he thinks prescriptions would solve most of the problem, lawmakers should continue to go after meth cooks and targeting their supply of ingredients.

The House committee is set to consider Smaltz's bill and other meth-related measures on Monday.

In the Senate, lawmakers are also working on bills that would give pharmacists the authority to deny pseudoephedrine sales and bolster reporting of drug related crime.

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