



NEWS RELEASE

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Sen. Jeff Sessions and State Sen. Larry Dixon Discuss National and State Efforts to Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MONTGOMERY – U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions and State Sen. Larry Dixon (RAL) today held a news conference to discuss national and state efforts to prevent prescription drug abuse.

Alabama last year passed a law to establish a prescription drug monitoring program. Dixon, who was instrumental in developing the state monitoring plan and shepherding it through the Legislature, provided an update today on the Alabama program.

Late last year, Sessions introduced legislation that would create a federal grant program to help establish or improve state-run prescription drug monitoring programs.

“Over the past 10 years, the abuse and diversion of prescription drugs has grown from a regional crisis to a national epidemic,” said Sessions, who as a member of the Senate Health and Education Committee chaired a hearing on the subject last year. “We need to help states mount an effective response to this problem, while ensuring that physicians have the information they need to provide their patients safe, timely and effective treatment for pain and other medical conditions.”

Sessions will be reintroducing his legislation shortly in the 109th Congress. Sessions said that while press coverage has frequently focused on the abuse and diversion of OxyContin and other narcotic pain relievers, the problem extends to several classes of commonly prescribed drugs, including tranquilizers and stimulants. It’s estimated that more than 6 million Americans are current abusers of prescription drugs that fall within these three classes.

Nineteen states currently have operating prescription drug monitoring programs. According to the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws, an additional 24 states are actively pursuing program establishment.

Sessions/Drug Monitoring Bill/Page 2 of 2

A 2002 report from the General Accounting Office (GAO) suggests that these individual state programs have been quite successful, but the report also clearly describes the limitations of the current approach. For example, while patients can and do cross state lines regularly to seek appropriate medical treatments calling for prescription drugs, others travel to neighboring states for the purpose of gaining inappropriate access to these medications. The scope of the problem is unknown because not all states have programs in place, and existing programs are not yet equipped to efficiently and effectively share information across state lines.

Sessions said the ultimate aim of his legislation is to make it possible to share the information across all state lines while maintaining the privacy of individual patients' medical records. This legislation would authorize \$95 million through 2010 for state drug monitoring programs.

A similar bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. Edward Whitfield (R-KY) passed the House of Representatives last year.

Today's news conference took place at the Alabama Department of Public Health. State Health Officer Dr. Don Williamson, whose agency will administer the Alabama prescription monitoring program, introduced Sessions and Dixon.