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Representative Smola Supports Bill to Curb Opioid Abuse

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means), joined with his colleagues today to unanimously approve legislation targeting the state’s opioid abuse crisis.

House Bill 4056, *An Act relative to substance use, treatment, education and prevention*, passed the House on a vote of 153-0. The final bill reflects a compromise reached by a six-member conference committee, which spent the past seven weeks working to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill that passed earlier this year.

“The Baker-Polito Administration and the Legislature have made a commitment to ending the scourge of opioid abuse, which has already claimed the lives of far too many people in the Commonwealth,” said Representative Smola. “This bill represents a positive step forward in our efforts to expand drug treatment and prevention in Massachusetts, but there is still more work to be done to address this public health crisis.”

An average of four people die from an opioid overdose every single day in Massachusetts, and the Department of Public Health (DPH) has reported that 3 out of every 4 communities in the Commonwealth experienced at least one opioid-related overdose death between 2012 and 2014.

The conference committee report retains several key provisions that were included in the original House opioid bill that passed on January 13. These provisions include: limits on the amount of opioids that can be prescribed for acute care patients; expanded use of the state’s Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP); and a requirement that hospitals conduct a substance abuse evaluation within the first 24 hours of an individual being brought to the emergency room after suffering an overdose.

In an attempt to curb prescription drug abuse, the opioid bill requires the PMP to be utilized each time a Schedule II or Schedule III narcotic drug prescription is issued. According to the Baker-Polito Administration, 4.4 million prescriptions were written and 240 million Schedule II and Schedule III pills were disbursed in the Commonwealth in 2014 alone. That same year, Massachusetts recorded nearly 1,300 opioid-related deaths.

The opioid bill also:

- imposes a 7-day supply limit for adult patients who are prescribed an opiate for the first time, and caps all opiate prescriptions for minors at a 7-day supply;
- gives patients the option of requesting a partial-fill prescription, or requesting in writing that they not be prescribed any opioid medications;
- requires the Drug Formulary Commission to identify and publish a list of FDA-approved non-opioid drug products that provide an effective alternative for pain management, and to distribute this list to all prescribers and dispensers;
- requires medical practitioners to receive training in effective pain management and the risks of abuse and addiction associated with opioid medication before obtaining or renewing their license;
- mandates that pharmaceutical companies operating in Massachusetts maintain or participate in a drug stewardship program to collect and safely dispose of unwanted drugs; and
- allows schools to utilize a confidential verbal screening tool to screen students for substance abuse disorders, which students can opt out of if their parents provide the school with prior written notification.

The Senate is expected to vote on the conference committee report tomorrow (March 10). Following a final vote on enactment in both branches, the opioid bill will be sent to Governor Charlie Baker for his signature.

For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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