

Idaho House committee approves 'Right to Try' bill

By KATHRYN HAAKE, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A House panel has approved a bill that would allow patients with terminal diseases to try drugs that have yet to obtain the Food and Drug Administration's final approval.

HB 481 passed through the House Health and Welfare Committee with support from Democrats and Republicans in an 8-2 vote Tuesday. It will now face the full House for a vote.

The bill would allow patients to seek out treatments or drugs that have already passed the first phase of testing with the FDA. The drugs will need to pass two more phases before the FDA officially allows the drug on the market. Kurt Altman of the Goldwater Institute – a conservative group that promotes so-called "Right To Try" legislation in state legislatures – told the committee Tuesday that process will likely take 8 to 10 years and cost a pharmaceutical company \$1 billion.

Democratic Rep. Melissa Wintrow, of Boise, said 24 states already have "Right to Try" laws on the books and another 20 states are considering similar legislation. She told the committee the proposal would cut through bureaucratic red tape and give patients struggling with terminal illnesses hope.

"This really gives the autonomy to a patient to make the decisions to save his or her own life," Wintrow said.

The measure was supported by the Idaho Freedom Foundation and a few private citizens who testified before the committee, telling heartfelt stories of their loved ones suffering from illnesses like Lou Gehrig's disease.

However, Rep. Fred Wood, R-Burley, and Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, both opposed the bill.

Rusche, who is a physician and also worked as an insurance company executive, warned the bill would interfere with clinical trials. He said there will be lawsuits

against insurance companies filed by people demanding coverage for drugs' unforeseen side-effects.

Wood warned the Legislature will see future bills requiring insurance companies to foot the bill of such treatments.

"I have never bought into the idea that because 49 of the states did something, we ought to do it," Wood said.

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