



MISSOURI SENATE

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Teen Prescription Drug Abuse Quadruples – Gov. Blunt Signs Bill to Combat Abuse

JEFFERSON CITY —The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) last week released results of a study reporting prescription drug abuse is at an epidemic level. The study found that the 15.1 million Americans abusing prescription medications exceed the combined total of those using cocaine (5.9 million), hallucinogens (4.0 million), inhalants (2.1 million) and heroin (.3 million).

Most alarming however is increase in the number of teens abusing prescription drugs. The study found the number of 12-to-17 year olds abusing prescription drugs increased 212 percent from 1992 to 2003.

This afternoon Gov. Matt Blunt signed SB 254, sponsored by Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington, and Rep. Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, preventing children from sharing prescription drugs at school. Senate Bill 254 prohibits minors from distributing prescription medication on school property to any individual who does not have a valid prescription. The legislation also illegalizes possession of said medicine without a prescription.

“The intent of this legislation is to get these kids treatment for their problems,” Engler said. “Right now the juvenile justice system is unable to help these kids, and the only remedy available to school officials is suspension. The current law was just not helping curb the problem.”

On first offenses under SB 254, any person under 21 years of age who distributes prescription medication to another minor without a prescription would be guilty of a Class B misdemeanor. A minor found in possession of prescription medication without a prescription would be charged with a Class C misdemeanor.

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“Taking prescription drugs for reasons other than their intended purpose is detrimental and possibly life-threatening to our children,” Tilley said. “This law will squelch the temptation to share invalid prescription medicine and will give us a better chance of saving our children from the pitfalls of drug use and abuse.”

Dr. David Waters, principal at the Farmington High School said, “This bill will allow high school administrators and law enforcement to combat a new area of drug problems that we are facing.”

Juvenile officers and administrators in the Farmington School District noticed this problem rising in the past few years and brought their concerns to Senator Engler and Representative Tilley.

“Several students have been hospitalized after taking these prescription medications,” said Jay Scruggs, a deputy juvenile officer in Farmington. “Juvenile officers from across the state have reported that this is a major problem in their jurisdiction and that this legislation would be beneficial.”

Other major findings of the study include:

- From 1992 to 2003, abuse of controlled prescription drugs grew at a rate twice that of marijuana abuse, five times that of cocaine abuse and 60 times that of heroin abuse.
- From 1992 to 2002, new abuse of prescription opioids among 12 to 17 year olds was up an astounding 542 percent, more than four times the rate of increase among adults.
- Teens who abuse prescription drugs are twice as likely to use alcohol, five times likelier to use marijuana, 12 times likelier to use heroin, 15 times likelier to use Ecstasy and 21 times likelier to use cocaine, compared to teens who do not abuse such drugs.

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To view the full CASA report, see www.casacolumbia.org/absolutenm/templates/article.asp?articleid=287&zoneid=32