



Commonwealth of Kentucky

Office of the Governor

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Governor Beshear Announces Initiatives to Combat Prescription Abuse

Joins Attorney General Conway, House Speaker Stumbo to push legislative action

to expand KASPER, regulate pain clinics

Frankfort, Ky. (Oct. 6, 2011) –Governor Steve Beshear today joined Attorney General Jack Conway and House Speaker Greg Stumbo in a multi-pronged effort to reduce the destructive impact of prescription drug abuse on Kentucky families. The three officials, who have each served as Attorney General, are working together to battle the prescription drug problem in their current positions.

Gov. Beshear announced a new process to facilitate the reporting of suspicious prescribing habits to the appropriate licensure boards for possible investigation.

The Governor, Attorney General and Speaker also announced plans to educate more physicians and dispensers about the use of the state's prescription monitoring program, as well as to develop legislation for the upcoming session of the General Assembly to expand use of the monitoring program and to regulate pain clinics.

Reporting Suspicious Prescribers or Dispensers to Licensure Boards

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) administers the state's drug monitoring program, Kentucky All Schedule Prescription Electronic Reporting (KASPER), which can collect data that may indicate irregular or improper prescribing or dispensing practices.

An advisory board of physicians, dentists, nurses, and pharmacists will work with KASPER officials and law enforcement professionals to create guidelines for generally accepted practices among different medical disciplines. These criteria will be used to guide when a prescriber or dispenser's KASPER reports may be flagged for unusual prescribing activity.

"We have an outstanding tool in KASPER that can flag suspicious prescribing habits," said Gov. Beshear. "This action is not to target physicians with legitimate patient needs for pain relief, but to root out the so-called 'drug dealers in white coats' whose entire professional practices are focused on feeding these devastating addictions."

Under the new process, those reports will be submitted to the Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure (KBML), Kentucky Board of Dentistry (KBD), Kentucky Board of Nursing (KBN) or Kentucky Board of Pharmacists (KBP), which may conduct further internal reviews or submit the report to Kentucky State Police or the Attorney General for investigation.

"One of the first meetings I had as Attorney General was with KASPER administrators to better understand the limitations of the system and how the tool could be better utilized to save the lives of Kentuckians who are dying every day of prescription drug overdoses," Attorney General Conway said. "Gov. Beshear and I have discussed this issue at length, and I appreciate him taking action to better utilize this powerful investigative tool."

A recent report from the Kentucky Department for Public Health says more Kentuckians are dying as a result of drug overdoses than those who have died from injuries sustained in motor vehicle accidents. The rate of drug-induced deaths has steadily risen from 2005 to 2009, while the number of motor vehicle deaths continues to decline.

Operation UNITE summits for prescribers, pharmacists

Gov. Beshear also announced that the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has awarded a \$60,000 grant to Operation UNITE, a regional anti-drug initiative in 29 southern and eastern Kentucky counties. The ARC has directed the grant be used to support several educational summits across the state for physicians and dispensers to learn about the danger of prescription drug abuse as well as the benefits of using KASPER.

Governor Beshear and Attorney General Conway will coordinate the summits, which will be held in three locations across the state in the coming months. Operation UNITE expects these summits will train approximately 1,000 health care providers.

Legislative Action Planned

Gov. Beshear, Attorney General Conway and Speaker Stumbo will work together on multiple legislative proposals designed to better track prescription drugs and choke off the supply of pills from illegal sources.

The Governor, the Attorney General and Speaker will support legislation to license and regulate pain clinics in Kentucky, with strict requirements regarding who may own or operate them. They will also support legislation to make KASPER a more robust, flexible and useful tool by mandating its use by all prescribers.

“This is truly a non-partisan issue that affects us all in numerous ways,” said Speaker Stumbo. “When I was Attorney General, the General Assembly unanimously passed a law that put a big dent in the out-of-state drug pipeline, and now I look forward to working with Governor Beshear, Attorney General Conway and every House and Senate member to do all we can to solve this cancer of prescription drug abuse. We cannot afford to wait.”

Multi-State Task Force to Address “Pill Pipeline”

Kentucky is already among the nation’s leaders in working to thwart the impact of prescription drug abuse. In August, Kentucky hosted the first meeting of a new Interstate Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force, which is composed of representatives from Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia and Tennessee.

The task force includes representatives from government, law enforcement, health care, and advocacy groups. The group is developing ways that states can work together to choke off the so-called “pill pipeline” of illegal prescription drugs streaming into those states from the south.

Some Kentucky authorities estimate that 60 percent of the area’s illegal prescription pills come from Florida, and the Kentucky State Police arrested more than 500 people from eastern Kentucky in 2009 who had traveled to Florida for this purpose.

The interstate task force is expected to develop cooperative regulations and legislation designed to limit the influx of illegal prescription narcotics into these states, as well as share best practices among the states for reducing abuse. Legislative recommendations from the task force should be available for consideration by the 2012 General Assembly.

“Kentucky is not an island,” said Gov. Beshear. “We live in a mobile society and that mobility limits the ability of any one state to be entirely successful in addressing substance abuse issues. A collaboration of state efforts can help put the brakes on the prescription abuse epidemic.”

Continued Call for National Response to Prescription Abuse

In April, Gov. Beshear testified before a congressional panel on the prescription drug abuse issues facing Kentucky and our nation. During his testimony, Gov. Beshear urged Congress to continue providing resources to the Harold Rogers Prescription Drug Monitoring Grant Program. The Governor also proposed mandatory training for those who prescribe controlled substances and requested that more federal resources be focused on ceasing Florida’s illegal prescription drug flow.

In February, Gov. Beshear strongly urged Florida Governor Rick Scott to reconsider his decision to not implement a state drug monitoring system previously approved by the Florida legislature. Gov. Scott later reversed his decision, and the drug monitoring project will be operational this year.