

Assembly passes 'right to try' bill to help terminally ill patients

Posted on Tuesday, Mar 7, 2017

The state Assembly today voted 85-13 to approve a "right to try" bill that would let terminally ill patients get treatments that have yet to win full FDA approval.

The bill, AB 69, would let eligible patients access a treatment that has yet to get approval from the FDA but has passed its phase 1 stage, which is aimed at figuring out side effects and safety concerns.

Rep. Pat Snyder, R-Wausau, said the bill gives those with terminal illness "a fighting chance at finding a cure."

The bill has gotten pushback from the Wisconsin Medical Society. The society says doctors sympathize with those patients, but the legislation circumvents the typical process for ensuring treatments are safe and effective.

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Rep. Debra Kolste said the bill offers "false hope" and that it's pushed by a think tank, the Goldwater Institute, that has a "total disregard for science" and dislikes the FDA.

"I think this bill does harm and certainly is not good public policy," the Janesville Dem said.

The FDA, she noted, already has a process in place to ensure people can have faster access to investigational drugs.

But Snyder said that process is overly cumbersome. The bill, he said, aims to help those who can't participate in clinical trials on a drug or who don't want to go through the "time consuming" FDA program Kolste mentioned.

“The last thing we as government should require them to do is wait,” Snyder said. “For these patients and their families, every day counts.”

The Assembly shot down several Dem amendments that would’ve, among other things, let people and their doctors know if any side effects pop up during further testing of a drug.