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Senate Majority Office

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Senator Bromley Introduces Bill to Deal with Unused Medications

Augusta-State Senator Lynn Bromley (D-Cumberland County) of South Portland has introduced a bill that will encourage the proper disposal of expired pharmaceuticals in Maine. If approved, the bill would be the first of its kind in the United States.

"Many of us have had the experience of getting a prescription and for a variety of reasons we don't use it all. Our choices are to leave the medication in the cabinet, throw it in the trash, or flush it down the toilet. There are problems with all these alternatives," said Sen. Bromley.

LD 1826, An Act to Encourage the Proper Disposal of Expired Pharmaceuticals will provide for safe and proper disposal of unused or expired prescription drugs by making use of pre-paid mailing envelopes. This would allow the unused medication to be mailed to an appropriate location for proper disposal.

Last year, Sen. Bromley began a conversation with Steve Gressitt, MD with the Maine Benzodiazapine Study Group about their mutual interest in reducing the incidence of drug diversion-where unused prescription drugs simply lying around the home can end up being sold on the street. Their conversation expanded to include concerns about the incidence of accidental childhood overdoses, as well as the severe environmental impacts of pharmaceuticals in the waste stream. The Maine Medical Association picked up on the conversation and immediately lent their unanimous support to Senator Bromley's bill.

"Maine physicians recognize the public health threat posed by unused prescription drugs that may be diverted to improper and dangerous use or may wind up poisoning our environment," said Gordon H. Smith, Executive Vice President of the Maine Medical Association. "Our Public Health Committee formally supported this important initiative through a resolution adopted at the MMA's annual session in September 2003," said Smith.

"As we began to research the issue, we discovered there was a huge amount of interest on the part of the medical community, law enforcement, poison control, the fishing industry, environmental protection at both the state and national level, and others. There is growing evidence that the current and common practice of flushing drugs down the toilet has a profound impact on the environment," commented Sen. Bromley.

In order to get a better handle on this issue, Senator Bromley convened a meeting with more than 20 interested parties representing a variety of stakeholders including: public health officials, retail pharmacies,

environmental groups, law enforcement and others to discuss the possibility of a legislative solution. Bromley noted, "We discovered that no state has yet to enact legislation on this issue, and in fact, a representative from Florida traveled to Maine to attend our meeting." There have been, however, a handful of pilot programs in Canada. Recently, Prince Edward Island and British Columbia sponsored one-time collections, much like our local household hazardous chemical collection days, and tons of unused and expired pharmaceuticals were returned!

"The more we talked the more we realized the enormity of the issue. I was struck by the level of agreement at the meeting-all in attendance agreed to move forward in order to find a solution," added Sen. Bromley.

Sen. Bromley plans to work with the committee, affected departments as well as community groups and pharmaceutical manufacturers to find public and private sources of funding to support this important legislation. The Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee will meet February 18 at 1:00 p.m. for a public hearing to discuss the bill, and will meet again for a work session on the bill Feb. 25. More information about the bill can be found at <http://www.mainesenate.org/expiredmeds>.