

Bill would have state pay for rape victim treatment

A minority version of Senate Bill 752 is in the House, and could be passed soon to the Oregon Senate for concurrence

By A. Sho Ikeda
Reporter

Rape victims will be given access to emergency contraceptives at no cost if Senate Bill 752, a bipartisan effort, passes the Oregon House of Representatives before the Legislature ends its session.

The bill has drawn fire from state legislators and anti-abortion groups, but there may now be only a few obstacles to SB 752 becoming law.

The bill would create a fund, supported by grants and donations, to pay for medical treatment and emergency contraception for sexual assault victims.

Kevin Neely, spokesman for the office of the attorney general, said the bill would allow hospitals and other medical facilities to charge the state fund for medical treatment of rape victims. Currently, many hospitals charge local law enforcement, which may refuse to pay for treatment.

"This way, we can ensure that the administration of treatment is paid for the victim," Neely said.

Michelle Edwards, community education coordinator for Sexual Assault Support Services of Lane County, said the availability of emergency contraception is inconsistent across the state, and she said she hoped the legislation would allow more access for Oregonians.

"I think it's a good move by the state," Edwards said. "It sounds like emergency contraceptives will be more accessible for everyone."

When first drafted in the Senate, the bill provided funds for

both emergency contraception and medical treatment, but the Senate erased that portion of the measure before moving it to the House. House Democrats then wrote a minority version of the bill at the committee level that reattached the provision covering emergency contraceptives.

Alan Fleischman — a legislative assistant for Rep. Jeff Barker, D-Aloha, who sponsored the minority version of the bill — said the bill got tied up in "abortion politics" in the Senate, adding that Barker thinks rape victims should not have to pay for medical treatment or any emergency contraceptives they may need.

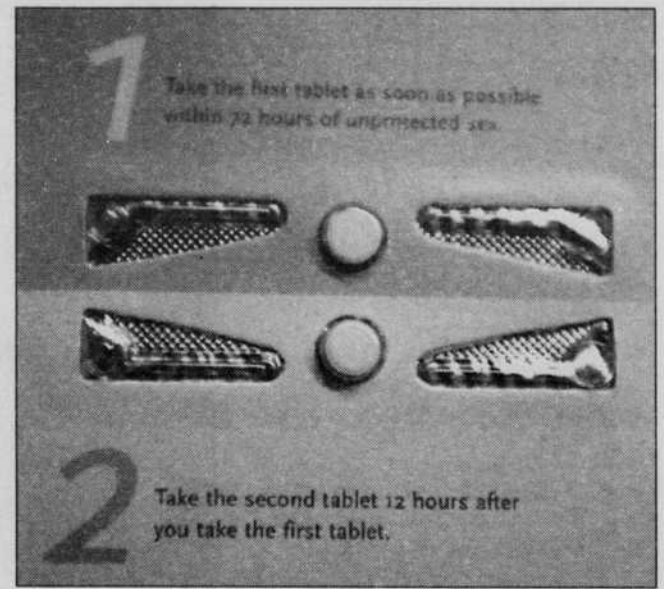
Dan McCullough, director of Christian anti-abortion group Survivors, said the organization supports immediate medical attention for victims of sexual assault, but does not support the administration of free emergency contraception.

"Because of the likelihood of an abortion occurring after fertilization, emergency contraception goes against our ideals," McCullough said.

Diane Duke, associate executive director of Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon, said the fund established by the bill would be vital for victims of sexual assault.

"In our dreams we would hope that emergency contraceptives would be easily available to all," Duke said. "But it is doubly important to have these treatments available to victims of rape."

Duke said many University students need to have easier access to emergency contraception. Incidents of date rape are not uncommon in a college environment, Duke explained, adding that the University Health Center offers free emergency contraceptives through the Planned Parenthood program. Emergency contraception is not yet provided from the state. However, according to the attorney general's office.



Jessica Waters Emerald

Plan B would be provided to rape victims for free if Senate Bill 752 passes.

If the House approves the measure, it will go to the Senate, which is split 15-15 between Democrats and Republicans, for concurrence.

Contact the reporter at shoikeda@dailymerald.com.



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