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Legal bailout for drug companies?

Senate leader proposes immunity for FDA-approved drugs & devices with Georgia ties.

ATLANTA – Despite decades of dangerous recalls and fraudulent drug trials related to FDA-approved drugs and medical devices, Sen. Bill Cowser (R-Athens) this week filed Senate Bill 101 which would extend immunity from civil lawsuits filed in Georgia to Georgia-based pharmaceutical companies and manufacturers of FDA-approved products.

Cowser is a floor leader for Gov. Perdue, who has claimed that SB 101 would help attract pharmaceutical companies to Georgia and create new job opportunities.

“This bill lets drug companies off the hook, plain and simple, even if the product hurts or kills someone” said Georgia Watch executive director Allison Wall. **“Georgians would have no recourse, no hope of accountability, period.”**

The only state to implement this type of legislation is Michigan, whose unemployment rates were the highest in the nation at the beginning of 2009. According to some Michigan lawmakers, pharmaceutical companies have actually moved out of the state since the passage of their drug immunity law in 1995.

“This bill was touted in Michigan as a job creator,” said John LaMacchia, aide to Sen. John Gleason (D-Lansing). **“However, since its enactment, the presence of pharmaceutical companies has shrunk. The large Pfizer facility in Ann Arbor down-sized and no new companies are moving in,”** he said.

In recent years, Vioxx, fen-phen and Bextra, among other FDA-approved drugs, were recalled after harming or killing patients. Before being removed from shelves in 2004, Vioxx injured at least 139,000 people.

“Essentially, this is a desperate bid for new biotech business at the expense of our legal rights,” said Wall. **“That’s a dangerous gamble for the Governor, risking the health and safety of Georgians against the interests of corporations.”**

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Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501-(c)(3) watchdog group focusing on consumer education and research in the areas of health care, insurance, identity theft and personal finance. Visit www.GeorgiaWatch.org for more information.