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Bee Column
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Legislation Enacted to Better Protect Today's Youth

The New York State Legislature passed a number of measures this Legislative Session to better protect today's young people.

Prescription drug abuse is one of our nation's fastest growing problems with more than 15,000 people dying from overdoses each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). In 2010, one in 20 people in the United States over the age of 11 reported using prescription painkillers for non-medical reasons. In an effort to cut down on the amount of prescription drug abuse, the State Legislature unanimously passed legislation that was subsequently signed into law by the Governor that creates the Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing Act, or I-STOP.

Although this new law will take more than 3 years to fully implement, the first step will be to modernize the state's existing Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP), which will eventually require health care practitioners or their designees to consult the computerized PMP Registry before prescribing or dispensing any controlled substance, exceptions include hospice and emergency room care. The updated PMP Registry will be secure and designed to be easily accessible by practitioners and pharmacists to view patients' controlled substance histories. The new system, which will take effect one year from now, is aimed at decreasing opportunities for "doctor shoppers" to illegally obtain prescriptions from multiple practitioners. Pharmacists or their designees will be required to report when a controlled substance has been dispensed in "real time," which will be determined through a regulatory process. The registry will be interoperable with other similar registries operated by the federal or state governments. The new law will also make New York one of the first states to move from paper prescriptions to electronic prescribing, which will help eliminate alteration, forgery or theft of prescription pads. E-prescribing, which is a secure method of transmitting prescriptions from practitioners to pharmacists electronically, will be mandatory for all prescriptions within three years with certain exceptions.

Also, according to the CDC, nearly 60,000 people in the United States are diagnosed each year with skin cancer. Roughly 65 to 90 percent of melanomas are caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light, which comes from the sun, tanning beds, and sunlamps. In an effort better protect teenagers from exposure to UV light, the State Legislature enacted legislation that was signed into law by the Governor that will prohibit persons 16 years of age and younger from utilizing indoor tanning facilities.

A similar measure will also prohibit body piercing studios from performing body piercing on people younger than 18 without written consent of a parent or guardian. Body piercing has been well-documented to have possible adverse health effects, with complications arising in 25 percent of all cases, including allergic reactions, skin

infections, scarring, and general discomfort. This measure awaits final approval from the Governor.

Electronic cigarettes are battery-operated devices that vaporize cartridges filled with nicotine and other chemicals that a user inhales. Despite their widespread use, little is known about the risks associated with smoking the devices. Recent testing by the Federal Food and Drug Administration has found that electronic cigarettes can be dangerous because users inhale carcinogens and toxic chemicals such as diethylene glycol, an ingredient in antifreeze. The FDA will most-likely regulate the use of electronic cigarettes in the future; however, the product has not been regulated by any agency until now. In an effort to protect children and young adults, legislation has been passed by both the Assembly and Senate that will prohibit the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors in the same way that the existing law regulates tobacco products. This legislation has not yet made it to the Governor's desk; however, I anticipate it to be signed into law in the near future.

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