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No plans for health conscience law change

Legislators say they need more details on Planned Parenthood dispute

NAMPA — Local lawmakers were not yet ready to say Thursday whether a complaint by Planned Parenthood against a Walgreens pharmacist could or should prompt changes to Idaho's health-worker conscience law.

"It's just like any other piece of legislation, any other bill. We're always willing to make improvements if we can," Senate Majority Caucus Chairman John McGee, R-Caldwell, said. "If there's a discussion that needs to take place where we discuss improvements that could be made to the law, that may be something we need to look at." However, McGee said he did not have enough information to form an opinion on whether or not the law needs to be changed.

Sen. Melinda Smyser, R-Parma, who sits on the Health and Welfare Committee, also declined comment on the issue until more information is available. She said she was not aware of any coming effort to alter or clarify the law.

A Walgreens representative said the pharmacist who is the subject of the complaint has addressed allegations she improperly balked at filling a prescription.

In a short statement issued Thursday, Walgreens spokesman Jim Cohn said the pharmacist had responded to the complaint with the Idaho Board of Pharmacy. He didn't give specifics.

Cohn said the board investigated the matter and "to the best of (Walgreens') knowledge" has not taken any adverse action.

Jan Atkinson, a Board of Pharmacy compliance officer, said Wednesday her office received the complaint in November, but indicated an investigation was continuing.

A Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest nurse practitioner contends the Nampa Walgreens pharmacist improperly used the state's conscience law to refuse to fill a prescription for Methergine, a medicine used to prevent or control bleeding of the uterus following childbirth or an abortion.