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Freedom of conscience bill advances

Health care providers who have misgivings about a treatment could decline to perform it.

The bill would give doctors, nurses and others the right to refuse to provide care or services that conflicted with deeply held religious or moral principles. "No health care professional shall be required to provide any health care service that violates his or her conscience," the bill says.

Senate Bill 1270 specifically says abortion, abortion-causing drugs, human embryonic stem cell research, human embryo cloning, euthanasia and assisted suicide are procedures or treatments that could conflict with a health care worker's values.

WHO'S FOR THE BILL

One sponsor is Sen. Russell Fulcher, R-Meridian. "It would, if passed, grant health care professionals out of an end-of-life procedure without having to worry about getting fired," Fulcher said.

Another cosponsor is Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise. "It would say that if you have a problem with this, then you shouldn't be forced to do it," Winder said. "But you have the obligation to notify your employer beforehand that you have an issue."

WHO'S AGAINST

Health care workers could not be held legally liable for their decisions under the bill. The Idaho Trial Lawyers Association sees that as taking away patients' rights to legal action. Fulcher said the provision was intended to apply to the employee-employer relationship, not to take away patients' rights.

NOTEWORTHY

Exactly which drugs fall under the category of medicines that induce abortion is not clear. Fulcher said it is not intended to include contraceptives. "There are legal definitions and medical definitions for the same word, and they don't necessarily line up," he said. Euthanasia and assisted suicide already are illegal in Idaho.

WHAT'S NEXT

The bill had been printed and was ready for the next step - a public hearing in the Senate State Affairs Committee. But sponsors are pulling it back for revisions based on comments from the trial lawyers and groups representing physicians and hospitals. Fulcher hopes a new version will be ready for the committee by next week.