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Midwives make progress

Midwifery advocates said a licensing bill should pass in the Legislature.

BOISE -- Midwife proponents say this is their year. Kris Ellis, a former legislator and lobbyist for the Idaho Midwifery Council, introduced a bill Thursday that mandates licensure for all practicing midwives, ensures they have adequate training and allows them to obtain the medications needed to safely provide their service.

"You have before you a bill that isn't opposed by anyone that we know of," Ellis said to the House State Affairs Committee.

The remark drew laughter from the committee members because midwifery licensure has been a deeply contentious issue during the previous two legislative sessions. "It's come a long way from where it was the first year and where it is now," said Rep. Janice McGeachin, an Idaho Falls Republican and sponsor of the current bill.

A midwife bill didn't make it out of committee in 2007. Ellis said last year's bill splintered over a provision that allowed midwives to carry certain medications. Some doctors in 2008 objected to the authority given a board of midwifery, which would have been allowed to make recommendations to a licensing body on what other medications midwives could administer beyond those specified in the bill, such as oxygen and local anesthetic.

That concern has been alleviated this year, said Mark Johnston, executive director of the Idaho Board of Pharmacy. The Midwife Council presented the current version to the board of pharmacy earlier this month, took suggestions and then added a provision giving the pharmacy board and the Idaho Board of Medicine final say as to whether midwives can administer drugs not specified in the bill.

The state's midwives cleared another hurdle when they agreed to mandatory licensing, McGeachin said.

Last year's bill provided for voluntary licensure, which left some wondering whether midwives not certified through a national midwifery organization would continue to practice and put expecting mothers at risk.

The simple change prompted many opponents to take a neutral stance on the issue, said McGeachin, who expects the bill to pass this session.

"The stars are in alignment," she said. "We will get it done this year."