

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



February 2011

Over the past decade, the number of prescription drug overdose deaths in Kentucky has more than doubled. More people are dying from drug overdoses in our state than traffic accidents. Fueling this problem is the illegal “pill pipeline” that exists between Kentucky and Florida.

Every day, Kentuckians make their way to South Florida’s unmonitored pain clinics. In 2009, doctors operating in Broward County dispensed more than 16 million prescription painkillers for a population of just 1.8 million, according to DEA records. An estimated 60 percent of Kentucky’s illegal prescription pills come from Florida.

Florida’s illegal “pill mills” are killing our kids and devastating families in every corner of the Commonwealth. Why is this happening? Florida is one of more than a dozen states without a prescription drug monitoring program in place to crack-down on overprescribing physicians, drug traffickers and addicts who go from doctor to doctor in search of pain pills.

As Attorney General and as a parent, I am deeply troubled by Florida Gov. Rick Scott’s proposal to eliminate implementation of an electronic prescription drug monitoring system that would help cut-off the deadly “pill pipeline.” Electronic tracking systems, in place in 34 states including Kentucky, are essential to curbing the diversion of prescription pain pills.

I have discussed my concerns with Florida’s Attorney General Pam Bondi. We agree we must work together to stop the flood of illicit prescription drugs between Florida and Kentucky.

Gov. Steve Beshear, Congressman Hal Rogers and White House Drug Czar Gil Kerlikowske have echoed my concerns about Gov. Scott’s proposal. During his recent visit to Kentucky, my investigators briefed Kerlikowske in Louisville and Eastern Kentucky. He saw firsthand the ‘significant’ prescription pill problem that exists in the Commonwealth,

particularly in Eastern Kentucky. We discussed the pressing issues related to the flow of illegal pills into Kentucky from Florida.

I will continue to work with local, state and federal authorities, as well as my fellow attorneys general, to address this very serious problem. Through my statewide Prescription Drug Diversion Task Force, we are increasing investigations into overprescribing physicians, doctor shopping and illegal prescription drug trafficking. The task force also participated in the largest drug-round up in Kentucky’s history, resulting in felony arrest warrants for more than 500 people.

The bottom line is that we need to stop illicit prescription pills at their source; states like Florida and Georgia that do not have prescription drug monitoring programs in place. Programs like Kentucky’s KASPER system are needed, warranted and must be implemented in all 50 states. Until that happens, prescription drug abuse will continue to ravage our families and our kids.

Jack Conway
Attorney General