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Senate Bill 51 “Controlled Substances Data Exemption for Veterinarians”

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In 2008, in response to the nationwide opioid epidemic, the Alaska State Legislature created the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP). This program created a database of prescriptions for controlled substances in Alaska, with the stated intent was to place obstacles in front of individuals seeking opioids from multiple providers. In 2016, the Legislature expanded the program to include veterinarians. Unfortunately, the program failed to account for the major differences between the practice of human medicine and veterinary medicine. SB 51 addresses this conflict by exempting veterinarians from the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.

Eliminating the requirement for veterinarians in Alaska to use the PDMP does not cause deregulation. Veterinarians will continue to be covered by federal statutes and regulated by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Alaska Board of Veterinary Examiners. Additionally, provisions in state statute will continue to limit the number of opioids a veterinarian can prescribe to a seven-day prescription, with two exceptions. Those exceptions are if the prescription is part of long-term chronic care, or if there is logistical or travel barrier to returning within seven days.

Prescription drug monitoring is not unique to Alaska. All 50 states have some variation of prescription drug monitoring, with 34 states exempting veterinarians. Previously, 10 of those states mandated veterinarians be part of prescription drug monitoring efforts; however, those states soon realized that including veterinarians had no clear benefit. Instead, these states found that including veterinarians in their prescription drug monitoring programs placed unnecessary time-consuming barriers on those who practice veterinary medicine. In Alaska, the PDMP fails to be effective because animal patients do not have identifiers such as social security numbers. As a result, veterinarians must try to get the private health data of those who seek care for their animals prior to treating the animal. This is both inefficient and an invasion of privacy.

Senate Bill 51 seeks to correct an overexpansion of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program to ensure continued access to veterinary care in Alaska.