



BIOTECHNOLOGY  
INDUSTRY  
ORGANIZATION

May 6, 2004

The Honorable Elizabeth Roberts  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
254 Norwood Avenue  
Cranston, Rhode Island 02905

Re: Opposition to Prescription Drug Importation Legislation

Dear Madame Chairperson:

On behalf of the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) I am writing to express our concern regarding two pending legislative initiatives, SB 2160 and HB 7230, that would permit Canadian pharmacies to import prescription drugs into Rhode Island.

Although BIO acknowledges Rhode Island's fundamental need to exercise budgetary restraint, we are deeply concerned that this initiative could have broad implications on the state's aspirations to become a center of excellence for biotech research and development. Any attempt to improve access to drugs should encourage, not discourage research and development. Medical innovation is the key not only for improving our health, but also for ultimately lowering health care costs.

State-sponsored importation programs may subject Rhode Island residents to a potentially unsafe drug supply. Even a systematic state-licensed importation program would pose great risk for consumers, as the purity, potency, and safety of such products can never be assured once they have left the control of the original manufacturer and the jurisdiction of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Today American citizens have absolutely the safest supply of medicines in the world. We cannot afford to risk that safety.

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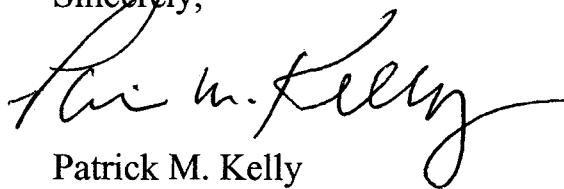
The importation of biotechnology derived products poses even greater concern for the consuming public. Most biotech products are biologic agents and are therefore highly dependent – for both the effectiveness and safety – on the conditions and temperatures in which they are stored and on how they are handled both during distribution and after they reach their destination. Because biologics are typically injected into the bloodstream, the risk to patients from such imported products, prepared or handled incorrectly, is immediate and incalculable.

Because of the sensitivity of biological and biotechnology products, congressional importation proposals generally have exempted these biological products from provisions that would legalize the importation of prescription drugs. Such exemptions, however, do not set our minds at ease. For unscrupulous pharmacy vendors and unwitting patients, the fact that it is unsafe to import virtually all of these products and that importing some of them could be life-threatening seems to be no deterrent at all.

The supposition that Rhode Island residents will be safely importing drugs from another industrialized nation is neutralized when considering Canada's trans-shipment of pharmaceutical imports. Canada has been found to serve as a pass-through for products from other foreign sources such as Ecuador, Iran and Argentina. Legislation creating a pathway for prescription drugs to flow from Canada into the U.S. only increases the risk of dangerous drugs entering the marketplace and exposing residents to potentially hazardous or counterfeit medications.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (202) 962-9200.

Sincerely,



Patrick M. Kelly  
Vice President  
State Government Relations  
The Biotechnology Industry Organization

cc: Gov. Don Carcieri

*BIO is the national trade association for the biotechnology industry, representing more than 1,000 member companies. Members include biotechnology companies, academic institutions and state biotechnology research centers.*