AIDS penalty approved

By MIKE HASTEN
State Editor

BATON ROUGE - Anyone knowingly exposing someone to the AIDS virus will be subject to fines and imprisonment under a bill approved by the House Saturday.

Lawmakers voted 60-15 in favor of Kenner Rep. Kernan “Skip” Hand’s bill that imposes a fine of $5,000 and jail term of 10 years for knowingly spreading AIDS to someone who is unaware that the person has the disease. The penalty is the same as that for aggravated battery.

“The bill limits exposure to sexual contact,” Hand said. “It would prohibit a person with AIDS from engaging in sex unless it is with a knowing and consenting partner.”

Shreveport Rep. Alphonse Jackson complained that the bill would “drive AIDS underground” because suspected victims of the disease would not submit for testing.

Jackson said AIDS victims would say “‘As long as I don’t know, I’m not in violation of the law.’ They could infect thousands of persons and not be guilty because they didn’t know they had AIDS.”

Hand said the bill tracks a statute prohibiting the spreading of venereal disease that has been on the books since 1918.

“This will encourage people to take responsibility for their own actions,” Hand said.

More than 30,000 Americans are stricken with the disease, he said, and 500,000 people are infected. About 75 percent of those who contracted the disease before 1984 have died.

Here’s how local representatives voted on prohibiting AIDS victims from having sex with partners who are not aware they have the disease. The bill was approved 60-15.

FOR - Ackal, BLANCO, Diesi, GOMEZ, LALONDE, Theriot.

AGAINST - None.

ABSENT - Benoit, Haik, Sittig, THIBODEAUX, THOMPSON.