AIDS testing repeal OK’d by House

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With no debate, the Louisiana House voted overwhelmingly Friday for repeal of a state law hurriedly passed last year requiring AIDS testing before issuance of marriage licenses certificates.

“Last year when we were trying to deal with this modern-day plague we rushed to judgment and passed a piece of legislation to require AIDS testing before marriage. What we have found this is not achieving the purpose for which the legislature passed it,” said Rep. Alphonse Jackson, D-Shreveport.

The House apparently agreed voting 85-2 for the testing repeal measure, HB344 by Jackson. Only Reps. John Travis, D-Jackson, and Buster J. Guzzardo Sr., D-Independence, voted against the measure.

Jackson said the law has caused a lot of Louisiana couples to go to the neighboring states of Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi to get married. He also said the tests are expensive, with costs sometimes running as high as $300.

In addition, Jackson reminded that heterosexuals are not a high-risk group for AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). The disease attacks the body’s immune system and leads to the death of its victims.

The disease is most common among homosexuals, intravenous drug users and hemophiliacs.

Jackson also pointed to problems encountered with test results.

“We are finding a lot of difficulty because some of the tests are coming back with a false positive,” he said.

Jackson said education of people, the modification of an individual’s behavior and additional AIDS research is the way “to deal with the AIDS plague.”

According to the latest state health office report, 805 Louisianians have contracted the disease and 514 — or 64 percent — of them have died.

Nationally, the figures stand at 56,662 cases, with 32,190 deaths among them.

When Louisiana passed the AIDS testing requirement in 1987, it became the first state in the nation to have such a law.

As the time of its passage, public health officials and American Civil Liberties Union representatives opposed the measure.

Health officials said it would accomplish nothing because the heterosexual population is at low risk. The ACLU opposed it as a further erosion of individual rights.