Panel OKs 2 bills requiring AIDS test

By LINDA LIGHTFOOT

Capital news bureau

Applicants for a marriage license would have to be tested for AIDS if either of two bills passed by a House committee Friday become law.


The committee, without discussion, later gave a favorable report to HB621 by Evelyn Blackmon, D-West Monroe, identical to initial form of the Carter bill.

Rep. Avery Alexander, D-New Orleans, a minister, expressed concern about an amendment to Carter's bill that would require applicants to pay for the tests.

Alexander said some provision should be made for indigents.

When someone made a remark that many welfare recipients don't marry, Alexander responded:

"There are indigents. They fall in love. They marry. They have a baby born with AIDS."

Then he added: "If people did what they should do, we wouldn't have AIDS."

The amendment requiring the cost of the test be borne by the applicants was approved.

The committee refused to take an exemption for Christian Scientists whose lobbyist had asked for a procedure by which a judge could excuse people from taking the test if it conflicted with their religious beliefs.

The American Civil Liberties Union opposed the bill.

"The wide ranging testing of a large group of people is not addressing the problem," Gary Clements said on behalf of the ACLU.

"Marriage license applicants are not a high-risk group."

He said the bill, if passed, would result in the testing of approximately 80,000 people a year, only an estimated 150 of which would test positively for AIDS.

"Setting a low-risk group is not the answer," he said.

"We will squander resources that could be much better focused," he said.

Clement suggested the resources could be better used on education and voluntary testing of the high-risk groups: homosexual and bisexual men, intravenous drug users, those transfused with contaminated blood, those who have had heterosexual contact with an infected partner and children of infected mothers.

"Don't you think an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure?" Rep. Sherman Copelin, D-New Orleans, asked Clements.

In rejecting the Christian Scientists plea for a procedure to avoid the testing, Carter told lobbyist David Smith, "You can die of AIDS if you catch it from a Christian Scientist or..."
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anybody else.”

Only Rep. Mary Landrieu, D-New Orleans, voted for the proposal requested by the Christian Scientists. Nine other committee members voted to reject the proposal.

In speaking on her bill, Blackmon said she was informed by a laboratory in Baton Rouge that the AIDS test costs $12. A Monroe lab quoted a $20 price, but she said the price would go down if the volume of testing increased.