

February 21, 2017

The Honorable Claire Ayer
Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

The Honorable Bill Lippert
Chair, House Committee on Health Care

Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

Re: An act relating to interchangeable biological products – Support

Dear Chair Ayer and Chair Lippert:

The Arthritis Foundation strongly encourages your support for an act relating to interchangeable biological products (“biosimilars”), which includes provisions allowing for the substitution of biological medications, including the provisions for prescriber communication.

The Arthritis Foundation’s mission is to improve lives through leadership in the prevention, control and cure of arthritis and related diseases. We work on behalf of over 139,000 patients in Vermont (including 600 children) who live with the chronic pain of arthritis every day. We help conquer everyday battles through life-changing information and resources, improve access to optimal care, and raise valuable funds to support research to find better treatments and a cure. This act would enhance patient access to new and potentially less costly medication and ensure that pharmacists are communicating critical and up-to-date medical information to physicians.

With such complex treatment plans as those for chronic diseases, physicians must know which medication their patient is taking in the event that any side effects occur. As such, it is imperative that physicians and patients are aware of the specific biologic dispensed. Not only would this communication maintain an accurate medical record, but it would also allow physicians to closely monitor the care and progress of their patients.

Not too long ago, a diagnosis of juvenile arthritis meant a child would be confined to a wheelchair or use of a cane and miss typical childhood activities. However, the development of biosimilars and biologic medications has dramatically improved long-term outcomes for children with arthritis. This act would allow interchangeables to be automatically dispensed by a pharmacist once approved by FDA. The act would therefore increase access to lower cost drugs for patients who rely on these medicines to treat serious and chronic diseases, such as arthritis.

Similar bills have been enacted in 26 states across the country – helping patients secure to access this innovative new class of medications. We are proud to advocate on behalf of the over 139,000 Vermont men, women, and children suffering from arthritis – the number one cause of disability in the U.S. – and ask for your support for an act relating to interchangeable biological products. Please contact me at bchandhok@arthritis.org or 513-484-7623 with any questions.

Sincerely,

Ben Chandhok
Arthritis Foundation
State Director for Advocacy and Access, Northeast

cc: Members, House Committee on Health Care
Members, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare