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Friday, June 13, 2003

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# House OKs changes to prescription plan

Associated Press

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AUGUSTA — The Maine House of Representatives gave final approval by an overwhelming vote Thursday to a bill to revise the Maine Rx law in response to last month's U.S. Supreme Court decision that gave the state a qualified endorsement of the prescription drug plan. The bill, which was approved by a 104-36 roll call, changes the program's name to Maine Rx-Plus. A leading supporter, Rep. Thomas Kane, said the legislation is built on components of the Rx program that were not challenged in court by the drug industry after the program was created in 1999.

The bill defines drugs to be covered, targets populations to be covered and addresses links between the state Medicaid program, known as MaineCare, and Rx-Plus, said Kane, D-Saco. Rx-Plus would cover 275,000 people.

Kane said Maine Rx-Plus "builds upon one of the most publicly supported" pieces of legislation to surface in the State House in



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recent years. The public would be watching carefully whether lawmakers restore the program, he said.

"We have the opportunity today to display the courage that the public expects," Kane said.

Critics suggested that the bill was rushed through the legislative process without a proper hearing or committee review after being introduced late in the session.

Rep. Thomas Shields, R-Auburn, conceded that the Rx-Plus bill is "a vast improvement" over the original Rx law, but described its hasty review as "a somewhat shameful and embarrassing way of doing things."

Shields also warned of "an upward creep of eligibility" in the program.

The bill defines eligibility for Maine Rx Plus as annual income of up to about \$31,400 for individuals and \$64,400 for a family of four. Those qualified would be able to purchase certain drugs at the same price paid by MaineCare.

The state would also be authorized to seek further discounts by entering into rebate agreements with drug manufacturers.

The bill faced a final Senate vote as early as today.



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