

Would harder to crush pills help curb drug addiction?

Terry Bryant holds a photo of her son, Mike, who died from a heroin overdose in 2012.

Mike Riopell | Staff Photographer

Mike Riopell

Bartlett's son, Mike, died in 2012 from a heroin overdose, and she said he first became addicted to painkillers after having his finger bitten off by a dog.

An Illinois House committee gave preliminary approval Wednesday to a plan that would make it easier for patients to get painkillers that break up into chunks, not powder. Powdered drugs are easier for abusers to snort or to dissolve in liquid and inject, experts say.

"I believe it would have sure helped our process," Bartlett said.

Representatives of the insurance industry said at the hearing they want to fight the drug abuse problem but said the legislation in question isn't the right move.

Making pills with abuse-deterrent properties the default option for people would raise prices significantly, they said.

"That is not the best use of our medical care resources," said Vern Rowen, a vice president with Aetna.

To demonstrate the pills' properties for the House committee, state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, a Chicago Democrat, crushed two different kinds of pills with a hammer at the witness table.

Meanwhile, two lawmakers have proposed requiring locking caps on prescription painkiller bottles.

Recovering heroin addict Nick Gore of Bartlett said the locking caps will help deter individuals from stealing pills from family and friends. They can be opened only with a personal code.

Gore became addicted to heroin after getting hooked on painkillers he was prescribed for kidney stones. He said heroin was cheaper and easy to come by. "The main problem right now is not heroin, it is prescription pills," Gore said.

"Whether it be Xanax, Adderall, but the main ones are hydrocodone, oxycodone that are being distributed throughout the schools."