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Scottsdale cryonics firm won't face state oversight

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Posted: Saturday, April 3, 2004 5:33 am | Updated: 5:20 pm, Thu Oct 6, 2011.

Le Templar | 0 comments

The Scottsdale -based Alcor Life Extension Foundation won't face direct state oversight this year as a lawmaker has stopped his push for new legislation.

Rep. Bob Stump, R-Peoria, said Friday he became concerned that proposed changes to HB2637 would unintentionally protect Alcor from a lawsuit filed by some family members of legendary baseball player Ted Williams. The body and severed head of Williams are believed to be stored in liquid nitrogen at Alcor's facility at Scottsdale Airpark.

Williams' eldest daughter — Bobby-Jo Williams Ferrell — and two of the Hall of Famer's nephews are asking a judge to force Alcor to reveal whether the organization obtained legal permission, known as a "document of gift," to store the body.

Attorney John Heer claims that Alcor is required to disclose the document under the Arizona Anatomical Gift Act.

Stump said Friday a proposed bill amendment supported by Alcor might validate the foundation's claim that it doesn't have to share that information, or affect future steps by Williams' family members.

"I didn't want to cut the legs out from any pending civil action," Stump said.

But Joseph Waynick, Alcor's president and CEO, said he believes Stump withdrew the bill because everyone needs more time to explore how state regulation of the cryonics industry should be established.

"I think it was the right decision to do," Waynick said. "We just kept running into unintended consequences with the language of the bill and the speed it was moving through the Legislature."

Alcor is the only facility in Arizona that stores frozen human bodies and heads in the hope that scientific advances will one day bring the dead to life. Waynick has told the Tribune that all bodies at Alcor are stored there legally and with written consent.

HB2637 would have required Alcor to obtain an operating license from the state Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers, and provide ongoing oversight by that agency.

Stump had moved the bill through the House, but encountered problems in the Senate. Two meetings were held this week in an effort to reach compromises that would lead to a successful vote before the Senate Commerce Committee.

Alcor officials have publicly said they welcome "reasonable" state regulation, but several times organized a campaign of e-mails and phone calls to lawmakers seeking to defeat the bill.

Waynick said Friday he has invited staff from the funeral directors board to tour the facility and review its procedures.

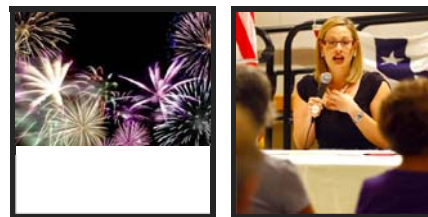
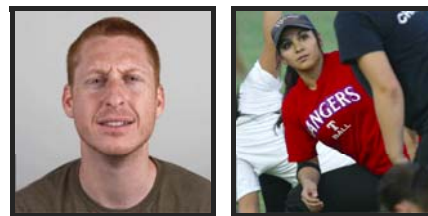
"We don't need legislation to let any agency of the state to come in here and look us over," Waynick said.

Heer said he couldn't envision a scenario whereby HB2637 would affect the Williams family's lawsuit against Alcor. He said he hopes Stump is simply awaiting a decision by the court so that the lawmaker can tailor a future bill that would address any loopholes, such as allowing Alcor to keep confidential the identities of bodies in its care.

"I certainly hope that's the case and he has not given up his idea of regulating the cryonics enterprises that are



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out there, especially Alcor," Heer said.

Stump said he wants to consider legislation again in 2005, but he doesn't expect it to require Alcor to change any promises to clients about protecting their identities.

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Commentary by Linda Hutchings, Special to Tribune



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