

SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 1772

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 23, 1997

The Senate Health Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 1772 with committee amendments.

As amended by committee, this bill amends the "New Jersey Controlled Dangerous Substances Act," P.L.1970, c.226 (C.24:21-1 et seq.) to designate ketamine hydrochloride, also known as ketamine, as a Schedule III controlled dangerous substance.

Ketamine is a rapidly acting general anesthetic occurring as a white, crystalline powder, which is given intravenously or intramuscularly and may produce vivid and sometimes unpleasant dreams. Although this drug has an accepted use in veterinary medicine, it has been increasingly used by youths in this and other states as a street drug called "Special K," which leaves the user in a heavily sedated condition and has been documented to result in instances of coma and even death. Raids of popular dance clubs in New York and New Jersey have resulted in charges of club employees distributing the drug. The high produced by ketamine may include hallucinations, delirium and disorientation, and high doses may cause respiratory distress, vomiting, convulsions and an inability to move. The drug may also cause elevated blood pressure and pulse rate. Users report a high that is both dreamlike and energizing.

Ketamine is chemically similar to PCP. In its injectable form, it is sold under the brand names of Ketajet and Ketacet. Illegal users may either drink the drug in liquid form, mixing it with bottled water or other liquids, or, more commonly, may convert it into powder, which can be either snorted or sprinkled on marijuana cigarettes and smoked. When packaged in its powder form, ketamine appears similar to cocaine, heroine or crystal methamphetamine. Veterinarians can buy a vial of ketamine for about \$7; however, a single dose of powder or liquid costs the abuser from \$25 to \$50.

Currently, the maximum penalty for possession of this drug is a disorderly persons offense (punishable by up to six months imprisonment or a fine of up to \$1,000, or both), because ketamine is not classified as a controlled dangerous substance. This bill is

intended to provide the law enforcement community with a more potent means of combating this growing problem.

The committee amended the bill at the request of the sponsor to classify ketamine hydrochloride as a Schedule III controlled dangerous substance, rather than as a Schedule II controlled dangerous substance.