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## Owner of Remington Drug keeps eye on new pharmacy law signed by governor

By Tate Hewitt Staff Writer  
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Co-owner Al Roberts (left) talks with customer Carol Grimes, who is holding with Aussiedoodle, Lacie.  
Photo by Doug Stroud

The owner of Fauquier County's last independent pharmacy is relieved that Gov. Glenn Youngkin **signed a bill** that would help pharmacists keep drug prices down for their customers — but Al Roberts believes that pharmacies like Remington Drug Co. are not at the goal line yet.

The Save Local Pharmacies Act will go into effect July 1, starting the clock for the state to sign a contract with a single pharmacy benefit manager for its Medicaid program.

Advocates say the change will protect pharmacies and save Virginia money. Limiting the number of pharmacy benefit managers with which the state has contracts is expected to reduce administrative fees — saving money for its Medicaid program, taxpayers and, ultimately, customers.



**Owner of Fauquier County's last independent pharmacy calls for action**

But for some pharmacists, the real win would be increased transparency.

Although benefit managers often negotiate lower prices for drugs, critics argue they usually pocket the difference, forcing pharmacists to sell some drugs at a loss.

“By going to a single (pharmacy benefit manager), it’s much easier to monitor them and hold them accountable,” Roberts said.

The law would force benefit managers to be more transparent about the prices they pay and charge for drugs. That would give independent stores like Remington Drug more power to negotiate.

“This is a great, great win for pharmacies and their patients,” Roberts said after the bill was signed into law, “but it's not enough and it's not soon enough.”

That's because the law gives the state Department of Medical Assistance Services an entire year — until July 1, 2026 — to contract a single pharmacy benefit manager.

In the meantime, the law instructs the state to hire an independent consultant to “evaluate the implementation of a contract with a third-party pharmacy benefits manager.” Roberts worried these details might stall the entire process.

“I would not be surprised if (the department) comes back in a year and says, ‘Hey, we need to push back the schedule’,” Roberts said.



Wendy Lear (back) has been a pharmacist for 30 years. She began working at Remington Drug Co. four years ago and "loves it," she said.

Photo by Doug Stroud

The pharmacist's hopes have been dashed in the past.

Since 2023, multiple bills aimed at regulating pharmacy benefit managers have failed to pass Congress. In December, sweeping regulations nearly passed as part of a spending bill, **only to be cut in early January.**

That's why Roberts is holding his breath on the Save Local Pharmacies Act.

In the meantime, independent and corporate pharmacies are closing across the country. Walgreens **plans to close 450 stores** this year, CVS **plans to close 270** and this week Rite Aid announced its **second bankruptcy** in two years.

Remington Drug Co. has been operating for 112 years and, despite the challenges, Roberts plans to keep its doors open.

“When pharmacies close, where do those patients go?” Roberts said. “They start flooding the urgent care clinics and hospitals.”

“We cannot let up the information sharing, the advocacy and keeping the Department of Medical Assistance Services Accountable,” he said.

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