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Legislator seeks changes in university licensing

BY JOHN MANASSO
STAFF WRITER

A Georgia legislator wants to examine how the state university system governs its intellectual property — an issue prompted by The University of Georgia Research Foundation Inc.'s dealings with a giant pharmaceutical company.

State Sen. Doug Stoner, D-Cobb, in an Aug. 22 letter to university system Chairman Richard L. Tucker, said the university should have a uniform policy “to determine the monetary implications of inventions prior to the signing of any agreement to market and sell the product.”

Stoner, though in the minority party, said he thinks the Senate could hold hearings on the matter in the next legislative session.

His letter comes after revelations that the University of Georgia Research Foundation, which governs the university's licensing of patents, may have lost as much as \$222 million by renegotiating a deal to license the blockbuster drug Restasis without the knowledge of its creator, UGA researcher Renee Kaswan.



BYRON E. SMALL

Renee Kaswan: Former UGA researcher says the university lost \$222 million by renegotiating a licensing deal.

Kaswan, who later sued the foundation and pharmaceutical giant Allergan Inc., said the new agreement cost her nearly \$100 million.

Stoner said that if Kaswan's allegations are true, then the state government should become more involved.

He wrote: “To learn that our Flagship University passed up such a sum when, at the time, we were looking at budget shortfalls in the State at large was astonishing.”

He also sent that letter to Sen. John Wiles, also of Cobb County, who sits on the Appropriations Committee and chairs its Higher Education Subcommittee, and Sen. Seth Harp who chairs the Higher Education Committee.

Copies also went to Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, regent Kessel Stelling Jr. and Chancellor Erroll Davis.

He is the third state legislator to write a letter on this issue. He said he has had conversations with Harp and Wiles on the matter.

Harp said he did not think the issue would get much attention at the next session, as the state must deal with a huge budget shortfall. He said it was “not very high on the priority list.”

Stoner also is concerned about the state's reputation. The Georgia Research Alliance has brought 58 researchers here as part of its Eminent Scholars program. Stoner does not want to jeopardize those efforts.

“Word's getting around,” he said. “... It concerns me that it could really damage our reputation.”

Reach Manasso at jmanasso@bizjournals.com