

Med-mal Changes Help Doctors
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CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) - Physicians' insurance premiums are down and more doctors are coming to Nevada since voters limited damages in medical malpractice cases, lawmakers were told Wednesday. But trial lawyers said many malpractice victims have been unable to go to court since the law's passage.

In 2004, Nevada voters passed the Keep Our Doctors In Nevada initiative, which put a \$350,000 cap on non-economic damages, such as pain and suffering, in medical malpractice cases. That law also limited the amount that goes to a victim's attorney.

The initiative, pushed by insurance companies and doctors who said insurers were leaving Nevada, superseded a medical malpractice bill passed during a 2002 special session. That law also capped damages at \$350,000 but allowed for exceptions in cases of gross negligence or "exceptional circumstances."

Nevada Insurance Commissioner Alice Molasky-Arman said seven companies and two self-insurance pools now provide malpractice insurance in Nevada, rates have stabilized from the rapid hikes that took place in 2002, and two companies recently filed for lower rates.

There are early signs that there may be fewer malpractice claims, but it's too early to reach any conclusions, Molasky-Arman told the Senate Judiciary Committee.