

## Graham pushing legislation to aid diabetes detection



By [Bob Shiles](mailto:bshiles@civitasmedia.com) - [bshiles@civitasmedia.com](mailto:bshiles@civitasmedia.com)

May 02, 2015 9:21AM



RALEIGH — A bill sponsored by state Rep. Charles Graham takes aim at encouraging medical professionals to put more emphasis on diabetes education and diabetes testing of children up to age 5.

The bill, known as “Reegan’s Rule,” honors 14-month-old Reegan Oxendine of Pembroke, who died in 2013 from complications resulting from undiagnosed diabetes.

“This legislation encourages early identification,” said Graham, a Democrat from Lumberton. “It really encourages dialogue between parents, physicians, physicians assistants and nurse practitioners who provide care for children. These medical professionals are encouraged, not mandated, to educate and discuss the warning signs of Type I diabetes and symptoms with parents during a child’s annual well-care visits up to age 5.”

Graham had strong support for the bill on the House floor, with it passing 111 to 6. It now moves to the Senate, with approval needed by that body before it can be signed into law.

Darice Oxendine, Reegan’s mother, said that the process for getting a bill began last year when she garnered more than 2,600 signatures on petitions asking that something be done to make the early detection of diabetes in young children a priority.

“Reegan was misdiagnosed as having a virus and acid reflux,” said Oxendine, a fifth-grade elementary teacher in the Public Schools of Robeson County. “It wasn’t until she was taken to the hospital in Chapel Hill, where she stayed six weeks, that it was found that she had been a diabetic since age 1.”

Oxendine is unaware of similar legislation anywhere in the United States.

“This legislation is being watched closely in other states and other countries where there are similar problems,” she said.

Tom Karlya, the vice president of the Diabetes Research Institute Foundation at the University of Miami, said cases such as Reegan’s, where diabetes is misdiagnosed in young children, “happens more frequently than you think.”

“People don’t always die,” he said, “but if they survive they may encounter brain damage or something else.”

Karlya has been an advocate for those with diabetes since 1992 when his daughter, at age 2, was diagnosed with the ailment. He also has a son who was diagnosed with diabetes in 2009 at the age of 13.

Karlya said he works to promote diabetes research and education every day, traveling 100,000 miles a year. He said that the problems that can be addressed by Graham’s bill are “preventable.”

According to Karlya, he has collected stories from families across the country that have experienced similar tragedies where their young children have not been identified as having diabetes. He has published these accounts in a 44-page report known as “A Child’s Cry for Change.”

“I’ve sent this report three times to the president (Obama) and have not heard anything back,” he said.

Karlya, who is known nationally for his advocacy of diabetes research, prevention and treatment, is called Diabetes Dad within the diabetes community. He writes on the Internet at [diabetesdad.org](http://diabetesdad.org).

“My goal is to see that there is more and more education,” he said. “I hope to take this law and emulate it around the country.”

If the bill passes in the Senate and is signed into law by the governor, it will become effective on Oct. 1.

Bob Shiles can be reached at 910-461-5165.