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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Rep. Anna G. Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, issued the following statement on the introduction of H.R. 1227, the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2005.

"I'm very pleased to join Representatives Biggert, Slaughter and Ney in introducing the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2005. This bill will prevent abuses of genetic information for workforce and insurance decisions. Advances in genetic science are already saving lives and will save many more in the years ahead, but these advances should not be the basis for denying Americans their jobs or their health insurance.

"One of the most significant scientific accomplishments in history has been sequencing the human genetic code. As a result of this achievement, scientists have identified genetic markers for a variety of chronic health conditions, increasing the potential for early treatment and prevention.

"Unfortunately, the ability to predict disease through genetic testing and family history opens the door for discrimination, particularly the employment and the health insurance industry. Such a threat has deterred the public and scientists from taking full advantage of the important opportunities that genetic information provides. Without appropriate protections to encourage providers, the health care community and the public to embrace genetic testing, the health care arena will be incapable of taking full advantage of the important opportunities resulting from the advancement of genetic information and technology.

"The Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2005 prohibits health insurers in both group and individual markets from:

- "Using genetic information to impose enrollment restrictions or to adjust premium or contribution amounts;
- "Requesting genetic testing or results except as necessary for treatment, payment, or health care operations; and
- "Requesting or requiring the use of genetic information for the purposes of underwriting.

"With regards to employment, the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2005 grants enforcement powers to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and:

- "Makes it an unlawful employment practice for an employer, employment agency, labor organization, or training program to discriminate against an individual or deprive an individual of employment opportunities because of genetic information;
- "Prohibits the collection of genetic information except where necessary to monitor the effects of toxic substances in the workplace, when authorized by the employee, or as required by law;
- "Safeguards the confidentiality of genetic information in the employment setting.

"The Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act of 2005 brings public policy up-to-date with science and ensures that every American can benefit from our scientific progress without the worry of genetic discrimination.

"I urge all my colleagues in the House to support this legislation."

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