

Dear Honorable Members of the Maryland State Legislature,

I am Chuying Huo, a 16-year-old eating disorder prevention advocate and researcher. I spearhead research at Harvard's Center for Geographic Analysis analyzing disparities in eating disorder treatment, serve as Vice President of the Eating Disorders Coalition's Youth Advisory Board, and am the Executive Director of CoVisualize, an international data research non-profit. I am heavily involved with several national and international initiatives relating to policy, public health, and eating disorder prevention. Many of the research studies I work on concern the physical and mental health of my peers and community. I am sharing my story today to express my passion for this issue. Recent research has brought to light the detrimental effects of weight loss supplements. As an eating disorder survivor, I am deeply concerned about the impact of these harmful products on my peers.

For the safety and well-being of our children, I strongly urge you to vote in favor of Bill HB634.

As a high school student, I have seen and experienced the dire effects of eating disorders. Social media has created crippling beauty standards, pushing young people down a dark path of disordered behaviors. I have witnessed many of my peers and friends turn to weight loss supplements in desperation, oblivious to the dire health implications. On social media, influencers advertise harmful weight loss products to their impressionable audience, giving false promises. During a school conversation, my classmate revealed that he would often go for days without consuming a proper meal, instead relying solely on energy drinks and dietary supplements to power through.

Diet pill companies use deceptive marketing to prey on children's insecurities, making unattainable claims. These weight loss supplements are sold in online venues and local stores across Maryland, making them easily accessible. There is little regulation surrounding these products due to the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act that prohibited the FDA from pre-screening dietary supplements. A study published in the journal of Clinical Toxicology found nine banned stimulants in a sample of 17 weight loss and sports supplements.

Because weight loss supplements are not pre-reviewed, many are laced with illegal substances with dire repercussions. Every year around 23,000 Americans end up in hospital emergency departments every year due to supplements, and a quarter of those cases are due to weight-loss supplements. According to researchers, these products have been linked to heart attack, stroke, kidney and liver injury, and even death.

Despite the current dire state of affairs, there is still time to enact change. Bill HB634 would save thousands of children, protecting them from large corporations that prey on the vulnerable. By voting in favor of this bill, you are protecting your state, children, and future. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Chuying Huo