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LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HB 634/SB 602

Sale of Diet Pills to Minors - Prohibition (Protecting Teenagers From Unregulated Diet Pills)

Submitted by Jason M. Nagata, MD, MSc
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Dear Maryland State Representatives:

I, Dr. Jason Nagata, am a pediatrician at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital and a faculty member at the University of California, San Francisco. I would like to share research supporting HB 634/SB 602 and to strongly urge you to sign critically important bill into law.

The U.S. weight-loss supplement industry generates over \$2.5 billion in annual revenue and youth are prominent consumers of these products.^{1,2} We have all seen these products in local pharmacies, grocery stores, and health food stores. What many people don't know is that weight-loss supplements are not reviewed by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for safety or effectiveness before they enter the market.³ However, research assessing the composition of these supplements have found that many are adulterated with banned substances, prescription drugs, stimulants, steroids, and other toxic ingredients.^{4,5} These additives are often associated with serious and detrimental health consequences.^{4,5}

Rigorous scientific study after study has shown that these types of supplements pose serious health risks to consumers. A recent study found that youth using weight-loss supplements were three times more likely than those using ordinary vitamins to experience severe medical harm, including hospitalization, disability, and even death.⁶ Studies have linked weight loss supplements to organ failure, heart attacks, stroke, and death.⁶⁻¹¹ The CDC estimates that supplement use leads to 23,000 emergency room visits every year, with a quarter due to the weight-loss category alone.¹²

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently issued a report strongly cautioning against teens using these products for any reason.¹³ Youth who use over-the-counter diet pills are six times more likely to be diagnosed with an eating disorder compared to nonusers.^{2,14} As a pediatrician specializing in adolescent eating disorders, I have cared for countless youth in the Bay Area who have used weight loss supplements, developed eating disorders, become critically ill, and required hospitalization. Hospitalizations for eating disorders have doubled at UCSF with similar trends around the state since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Diet pills, weight loss supplements, and eating disorders affect youth of all races, genders, sexual orientations, sizes, and

socio-economic backgrounds. Weight loss supplements worsen health inequities and disproportionately affect people of color, low-income households, and those without health insurance.^{15,16} We need to get these dangerous products out of the hands of our kids.

HB 634/SB 602 gives Maryland lawmakers the opportunity to take action now to protect our children. This bill would prevent the sale of weight-loss supplements and over-the-counter diet pills to minors across the state. Additionally, it would move these products from open shelves to behind the counter, just as we have done with other harmful products such as cigarettes. I urge you to sign HB 634/SB 602 into law. We must act now to protect the children of Maryland.

Thank you for your time and leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Nagata". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Citations

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