

Dear Maryland Legislators,

My name is Ryan Ahmed and I am a student in the Bronx who has seen eating disorders and body dysmorphia play a detrimental role in our classrooms, in the sporting field, and in household settings.

Ever since I was 12 years old, I have been involved in combat sports, my favorite, mixed martial arts. And in this community in particular, weight and the outlooks of your body felt like results, when it really should not. I felt like what I was already doing was not enough.

On the internet I tried searching for the fix to my issues. I felt that the only way I could ever feel better was that I began to “look” better, by losing weight and building muscle. And just from one search, for years to this day, I am met with countless advertisements for products that claim to be a quick fix to my weight issues and my perception of self.

Almost every video or article I click on, I am flooded with built men and women saying that the panacea to all of this was if I bought these supplement products.

“Feed the machine.”

“Just Be a Man”

“Get bigger everyday”

“Lose 20 pounds in one month”

To any child, these messages are overwhelming, but a major part of many of them wants to look like those same “fit and athletic” people and to have those same bodies, man or woman. At the age of 13 I decided to go to my local corner store to finally buy these products, which I felt were perfectly good for me.

These products were filled in isles, as there were seas of options, products, companies, and sales reps. It is so easy for a child to buy these products in large amounts at their closest GNC or local market without parental supervision. A common scary question amongst young people in these stores are: “What’s the strongest supplement you got?” However, little did my 13 year old self know about the dangers of these products. Little did I know that these products are under-regulated by the FDA and are often found laced with dangerous chemicals. Fortunately, my mom found these products before I had consumed them, to later throw them out and make sure I never took them again.

This issue, however, goes beyond just boys or just girls. It affects many youths, as one of my sparring partner’s childhood friends was healthy as a student athlete, but was hospitalized for months due to a heart attack. No one knew the cause of this, but then his parents walked into his room and found these exact supplement products hidden in the drawer. This is how dangerous these products are, as inaction can lead to consequences amongst the community of people my age.

It goes without saying that mental health issues only rose due to the pandemic, and now more than ever, young people are turning to these products in hopes it would help them feel better about themselves. The supplements industry is marketing towards all youth members and especially those in marginalized communities, so when thinking about this act, it can help protect your own children, your younger cousins, and your nephews and nieces.

Thank you so much.

Ryan Ahmed