



## Out of Kids' Hands: What Massachusetts Can Do to Regulate the Sale of Diet Pills and Muscle-Building Supplements

**REQUEST:** STRIPED, MEDA, and NEDA urge state leaders to protect the young people of Massachusetts from the dangers of diet pills and muscle-building supplements. A new bill, introduced by Representative Kay Khan, aims to address this issue. If passed, this bill will ban the sale of diet pills and muscle-building supplements to minors under 18 years old and will move these products behind the counter, requiring consumers to request them directly from a pharmacist, manager, or other store supervisory personnel.

### THE PROBLEM

- **Our youth are at risk!** Diet pills and muscle-building supplements are linked with eating disorders as well as body dysmorphic disorder. More than 30 percent of children and adolescents take dietary supplements on a regular basis,<sup>1</sup> and 11%<sup>1</sup> of teens report ever using dietary supplements for weight loss. An estimated 300,000 Massachusetts residents suffer from eating disorders.
- **Dangerous products.** Dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building are associated with serious health risks and side effects including organ failure, testicular cancer, heart attack, stroke, and even death.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> Some supplements are adulterated with illegal substances such as steroids, prescription pharmaceuticals, and heavy metals.<sup>6</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics has released reports stating that teens should never use diet pills<sup>7</sup> or muscle-building supplements.<sup>8</sup>
- **Insufficient regulation of dietary supplements by the FDA.** Supplements are taken off shelves by the FDA only *after* reports of serious injury or death.<sup>9</sup> Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, along with the attorneys general of 13 other states, joined in a letter to the U.S. Congress seeking a federal investigation into the dietary supplements industry. But Massachusetts residents need greater protection now.

### STEPS MASSACHUSETTS CAN TAKE TO PROTECT ITS YOUTH

- 1) PROHIBIT SALE TO MINORS.** Massachusetts can prohibit the sale of diet pills and muscle-building supplements to minors under the age of 18 years. Due to their developmental stage, youth may be unable to weigh the harms linked with these products.
- 2) MOVE PRODUCTS BEHIND THE COUNTER.** Moving diet pills and muscle-building supplements from the shelves to behind the counter will ensure that consumers will first speak with a pharmacist, manager, or other store supervisory personnel.
- 3) URGE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.** The Massachusetts Legislature can urge the State Attorney General to enforce consumer protection statutes that prohibit unfair or deceptive advertising of diet pills and muscle-building supplements.
- 4) EDUCATE CONSUMERS.** The Massachusetts Department of Public Health can educate consumers about the health risks associated with dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building, as well as the risks associated with misuse and abuse of over-the-counter diet pills.

## **SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders**

Boston Children's Hospital  
Division of Adolescent/Young Adult Medicine  
300 Longwood Avenue, LO306  
Boston, MA 02115  
617-355-4191  
[www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped)

### **Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association**

288 Walnut Street, Suite 130  
Newton, MA 02460  
617-558-1881  
[www.medainc.org](http://www.medainc.org)

### **National Eating Disorder Association**

165 West 46<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 402  
New York, NY 10036  
212-575-6200  
[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

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