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TESTIMONY

Submitted to the New York State Senate and Assembly in support of S16A and A431A, “Restrictions on sale of over-the-counter diet pills and dietary supplements for weight loss or muscle building”

Submitted by Jason M. Nagata, MD, MSc
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April 26, 2021

Dear Honorable Members of the New York State Senate and Assembly:

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 Senate Bill S16A and Assembly Bill A431A and to strongly urge you to vote in favor of this critically important bill.

The U.S. weight-loss and muscle-building 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 and muscle-building 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 and muscle-building 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 two reports 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} Use of muscle-building supplements has also been linked to eating disorders.¹⁴ Young people who use muscle-building supplements are more likely to subsequently use illegal muscle-building drugs like anabolic steroids¹⁵ and develop problematic alcohol use behaviors.¹⁶ As a pediatrician specializing in adolescent eating disorders, I have cared for countless youth who have used weight

loss or muscle-building supplements, developed eating disorders, become critically ill, and required hospitalization. Hospitalizations for eating disorders have doubled at UCSF with similar trends around the country since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Diet pills, weight loss and muscle-building supplements, and eating disorders affect youth of all races, genders, sexual orientations, sizes, and socio-economic backgrounds. Weight loss and muscle-building supplements worsen health inequities and disproportionately affect people of color, low-income households, and those without health insurance.¹⁷⁻²⁰ We need to get these dangerous products out of the hands of our kids.

Senate Bill S16A and Assembly Bill A431A gives New York 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 vote in support of Senate Bill S16A and Assembly Bill A431A. We must act now to protect the children of New York.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jason Nagata". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

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Citations

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