

November 2021

Dear Honorable Lawmakers of the New Jersey Assembly and Senate:

We the undersigned respectfully request your support of **New Jersey A3152 / S2387**, introduced by Assemblymember Herb Conaway, Jr., Assemblymember Sterley S. Stanley and Senator Troy Singleton. If passed, A3152/S2387 will protect children across New Jersey by prohibiting the sale of harmful over-the-counter diet pills and dietary supplements for weight loss and muscle building to any person under 18 years of age.

While these dietary supplements deceptively claim to promote healthy weight loss or muscle building – some using celebrity endorsers – these products are not required to demonstrate rigorous testing for safety or efficacy before entering the market, are not medically recommended, and are inadequately regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Alarming, there are no age restrictions on the sale of these products, leaving young people, who are particularly vulnerable to deceptive marketing claims, with no protection from purchasing these dangerous products.

Extensive research documents the dangers of these products:

- The **American Academy of Pediatrics** has strongly cautioned against teens using these products. <sup>1-2</sup>
- The **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** does not screen supplements for safety or efficacy. <sup>3</sup>
- Weight-loss and muscle-building supplements have been found to be **laced with pesticides, heavy metals, anabolic steroids, and pharmaceuticals that can cause strokes, cancer, and severe liver injury**, which sometimes require transplants or cause death. <sup>4-7</sup> Not only are these products not proven effective, they can be dangerous.
- A recent study documented a **50% increase in calls to poison control centers** over the past decade due to dietary supplements, many of which claimed to promote weight loss. <sup>8</sup>
- **23,000 Americans** are sent to **emergency rooms** every year due to dietary supplements. **25%** of those cases are **due to weight-loss supplements**. <sup>9</sup>
- A 2019 study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* identified nearly **3 times increased risk for serious medical events** (such as hospitalization, emergency room visits, and death) for dietary supplements sold for weight loss muscle building as compared to vitamins. <sup>10</sup>
- These products are widely used in the United States, with **one in five women and one in 10 men** reporting ever **using supplements sold for weight loss**. <sup>11</sup> **Use of muscle-building supplements** in adolescents are also prevalent, with one study finding nearly **11% of adolescent boys and 6% of adolescent girls** reporting use of these products. <sup>12</sup>
- **Latinx teens are 40% more likely to use OTC diet pills** than white teens. <sup>13</sup>
- Adolescent and young adult women who use OTC pills have **6 times the risk of being**

**diagnosed with an eating disorder** within the next three years compared to non-users.<sup>14</sup>

- Young men who take creatine and other similar substances are **3 times more likely to start using anabolic steroids** in just a few years.<sup>15</sup>
- A study identified 9 different, **dangerous stimulants not approved by the FDA** but used in dietary supplements. These adulterated supplements have been linked to serious adverse health effects, including sudden death. **Experimental drug “cocktails”** have been repeatedly found in weight-loss supplements, endangering consumers of all ages, including children.<sup>16</sup>

We must take action now to protect the children of New Jersey by **making it harder for children to be targeted by the empty promises of under-regulated weight-loss and muscle-building supplements**. These products pose a serious risk to children of all ethnicity groups, genders, and ages across the state. The **Food and Drug Administration** has *yet to approve any over-the-counter weight-loss and muscle-building products for children*.

Restricting access puts New Jersey’s public health approach in line with physician recommendations. **We, the undersigned, urge your support of A6156/S4121 to protect young people in New Jersey from these dangerous products.**

On behalf of the organizations and individuals listed below,



S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Director of STRIPED

Organizations:



S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Director, Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders



Rebecca Eyre, MA, LMHC, Chief Executive Officer, Project Heal



Johanna Kandel, Founder and Executive Director, The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness



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