

## Talking Points

### **A3512/S2387: Prohibits sale of certain diet pills and dietary supplements for weight loss or muscle building to persons under 18 years of age**

*Sponsored by: New Jersey Senator Troy Singleton and Assemblyman Herb Conaway Jr.*

1. In 2019, American households spent over \$2.5 billion on weight-loss supplements, and the sector is estimated to increase to \$4 billion in annual revenue by 2027.<sup>1</sup> Although supplements sold for weight loss are not recommended by doctors, they are widely used in the United States, with one in five women and one in 10 men reporting ever using these products.<sup>2</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>3</sup>
  - Dietary supplements can easily be purchased by people of all ages at pharmacies, grocery stores, health food stores, and other retailers. These products are under-regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are not screened by the FDA for safety or efficacy before they are released on to the market.<sup>4</sup>
2. Research shows that dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle-building are too often laced with prescription drugs and dangerous chemicals and are associated with serious health risks, including stroke, testicular cancer, and severe liver injury, sometimes requiring transplants or even leading to death.<sup>5-9</sup>
  - The rate of liver failure caused by dietary supplements has risen 185% in the past decade<sup>10</sup>, and 16% of cases of serious drug-induced liver injury in the United States are attributed to dietary supplements, the vast majority being those sold for weight loss and muscle-building.<sup>11</sup>
3. There are many types of diet pills on the market. One over-the-counter drug for weight loss—a form of the medication orlistat—has been approved by the FDA; however, this drug was not approved for people under the age of 18 years.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, there are currently no measures in place to prevent minors from purchasing this drug or other over-the-counter weight loss products.
4. These products serve as a gateway to eating disorders among girls and anabolic steroid abuse among boys. In fact, young men who take creatine and other similar substances are three times more likely to start using anabolic steroids in just a few years.<sup>13</sup> Adolescent and young adult women who use diet pills have six times the risk of being diagnosed with an eating disorder within the next three years compared to non-users.<sup>14</sup> Banning the sale of diet pills to minors could help prevent misuse and abuse of this drug by youth in New Jersey who are struggling with eating disorders.
5. Weight-loss supplements exacerbate gender and racial/ethnic health inequities. Girls and women are two times more likely to use weight-loss supplements in their lifetimes than are boys and men, and Black and Latino communities have a higher lifetime use of weight-loss supplements than white communities.<sup>15</sup> One study revealed Latino teens had nearly 40% higher risk of using over-the-counter diet-pill in the past month than their white non-Latino peers and these disparities are just getting worse over time, with 1 in 10 Latina girls reporting over-the-counter diet-pill use in the past month.<sup>16</sup>
6. The American Academy of Pediatrics has strongly cautioned against teens using weight-loss supplements or muscle-building supplements.<sup>17-19</sup> New Jersey has a responsibility to protect its youth from potentially dangerous products sold for weight loss and muscle building.
  - Assemblyman Herb Conaway Jr. and Senator Troy Singleton have introduced a bill that, if passed, would regulate the sale of diet pills and muscle-building supplements. This bill would ban the sale of these products to minors younger than 18 years old.

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