

January 2024

Re: Assembly Bill 82 (A. Weber) Dietary supplements for weight loss and over-the-counter diet pills

Dear Honorable Lawmakers of the California State Legislature:

We the undersigned respectfully request your support of **AB-82, “Dietary supplements for weight loss and over-the-counter diet pills.”** Authored by Assemblymember Akilah Weber, this important legislation would protect children across California by prohibiting the sale of weight-loss dietary supplements and over-the-counter (OTC) diet pills in stores or online to any person under 18 years of age. This bill would also ensure that health-related notices regarding these dangerous products are conspicuously posted at each purchase counter in stores.

While these dietary supplements deceptively claim to promote healthy weight loss – 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 weight-loss supplements.**¹
- The **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** **does not screen supplements** for safety or efficacy.²
- Weight-loss 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.³ 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.⁴
- **23,000 Americans** are sent to **emergency rooms** every year due to dietary supplements. **25%** of those cases are **due to weight-loss supplements.**⁵
- A 2019 study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* identified a **3 times increased risk for serious medical events** (such as hospitalization, emergency room visits, and death) for dietary supplements sold for weight loss and OTC diet pills as compared to vitamins.⁶
- **11% of teens** report ever having **used dietary supplements for weight loss.**⁷
- **Latinx teens are 40% more likely to use OTC diet pills** than white teens.⁸

- 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.⁹
- 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.¹⁰

We must take action now to protect the children of California by **making it harder for children to be targeted by the empty promises of under-regulated weight-loss supplements**. These products pose a serious risk to children of all ethnicity groups, genders, and ages across the state. The **American Academy of Pediatrics** has *strongly cautioned against teens using these products*. The **Food and Drug Administration** has *yet to approve any over-the-counter weight-loss products for children*.

Restricting access puts California’s public health approach in line with physician recommendations. **We, the undersigned, urge your support of AB-82 to protect young people in California from these dangerous products.**

On behalf of the organizations and individuals listed below,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Bryn Austin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "B".

S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Director of STRIPED

Organizations:



Laura MacCleery, J.D.
Director, Strategy and Program
Center for Science in the Public Interest



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



Akiera Gilbert, Chief Executive Officer, Project Heal



Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, President, Eating
Disorders Coalition



Monika Ostroff, LICSW, CEDS-S, Executive Director, Multi-
Service Eating Disorders Association (MEDA)



Elizabeth Thompson, Executive Director,
National Eating Disorders Association



Elissa Myers, CAE, IOM, CEO & Executive Director, Academy for
Eating Disorders



Samuel E. Menaged, President & CEO, Renfrew Center for Eating
Disorders



Johanna Kandel, Founder and Executive Director, Awareness



Denise Hamburger, Founder and Executive Director, Be Real USA



Ryan F. Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer & Founder, Finxerunt Policy Institute, International Socioeconomics Laboratory



Finxerunt
Policy Institute



International
Socioeconomics
Laboratory

Kelsey Wu, Founder and Executive Director, For You



Dani Gilady, Executive Director, The Eating Disorder Foundation



Stacey Lorin Merkl, Founder & Executive Director, Realize Your Beauty, Inc.



Beth Rose, Co-Founder & Board Chair, Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance



Lucas Chu, Founder, Erevna, Policy for the People



Mahmoud Abdellatif
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Ncarth

NCARTH

Robert C. Fellmeth
Price Professor of Public Interest Law, USD School of Law
Executive Director, Children's Advocacy Institute



Kristen Portland, Executive Director,
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and
Associated Disorders



:

Rehman Hassan

Rehman Hassan, CEO, Founder
iCure Health International



Individuals:

Dr. Michael Levine

Dr. Jerel Calzo

Ms. Jordan Levinson

References

1. Golden NH, Schneider M, Wood C. Preventing Obesity and Eating Disorders in Adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138(3). LaBotz M, Griesemer BA, AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness. Use of Performance-Enhancing Substances. *Pediatrics*. 2016;138(1).
2. Pomeranz JL, Barbosa G, Killian C, Austin SB. The Dangerous Mix of Adolescents and Dietary Supplements for Weight Loss and Muscle Building. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*. 2015;21(5):496-503.
3. Abdel-Rahman A, Anyangwe N, Carlucci L, et al. The Safety and Regulation of Natural Products Used as Foods and Food Ingredients. *Toxicological Sciences*. 2011;123(2):333-348. Fong TL, Klontz KC, Canas-Coto A, et al. Hepatotoxicity Due to Hydroxycut: A Case Series. *American Journal of Gastroenterology*. 2009;105(7):1561-1566. Grundlingh J, Dargan PI, El-Zanfaly M, Wood DM. 2,4-Dinitrophenol (DNP): A Weight Loss Agent with Significant Acute Toxicity and Risk of Death. *Journal of Medical Toxicology*. 2011;7(3):205-212. Guyda HJ. Use of Dietary Supplements and Hormones in Adolescents: A Cautionary Tale. *Pediatric Child Health*. 2005;10(10):587-590.
4. Rao N, Spiller HA, Hodges NL, Chounthirath T, Casavant MJ, Kamboj AK, Smith GA. An Increase in Dietary Supplement Exposures Reported to US Poison Control Centers. *Journal of Medical Toxicology*. 2017;13(3):227-37.
5. Geller AI, Shehab N, Weidle NJ, Lovegrove MC, Wolpert BJ, Timbo BB, Mozersky RP, Budnitz, DS. Emergency department visits for adverse events related to dietary supplements. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2015;373(16):1531 - 40.
6. Or F, Kim Y, Simms J, Austin SB. Taking stock of dietary supplements' harmful effects on children, adolescents, and young adults. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2019;65(4):455-461.
7. Wilson KM, Klein, JD, Sesselberg TS, et al. Use of Complementary Medicine and Dietary Supplements among U.S. Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2006;38(4):385-394. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2005.01.010.
8. Vitagliano J, Beccia A, Mattei J, Cory H, Austin SB. Disproportionate risk of over-the-counter diet pill use among Latinx youth: Results of a national study (In preparation).
9. Levinson JA, Sarda V, Sonnevile K, Calzo JP, Ambwani S, Austin SB. Diet pill and laxative use for weight control and subsequent incident eating disorder in U.S. young women (2001-2016). *American Journal of Public Health*. 2020;110(1):109-111.
10. Cohen P, Benner C, McCormick D. Use of a pharmaceutically adulterated dietary supplement, Pai You Guo, among Brazilian-born women in the United States. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 2012;27(1):51-56.