Talking Points
An Act Protecting Children From Harmful Diet Pills and Muscle-Building Supplements
Sponsored by: Rep. Kay Khan

State Rep. Kay Khan (D-Newton) has introduced a bill that, if passed, would regulate the sale of diet pills and muscle-building supplements. This bill would restrict the sale of these products to adults 18 years and older and require these products be kept behind the counter instead of on open shelves, as is done with cigarettes, alcohol, and other products known to pose health risks. Here’s why that matters:

1. Although supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building are not recommended by doctors, they are widely used—even by teenagers. Roughly 1 in 7 adults and 1 in 10 teens in the United States reported using weight loss supplements at some point in their lives.
   - The market for dietary supplements is a $32 billion a year industry.
   - Dietary supplements can easily be purchased by people of all ages at pharmacies, grocery stores, health food stores, gyms, and other retailers.
   - The American Academy of Pediatrics has released reports stating that teens should never use diet pills or muscle-building supplements.

2. Because supplements for weight loss and muscle-building are not tested before going on the market, they can pose health risks. Dietary supplements are not screened by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for safety or effectiveness before they are sold. Research shows that dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building often contain drugs that are prescription-only, illegal, or untested for human use. This can lead to serious health risks, including stroke, testicular cancer, severe liver injury, and even death.
   - The rate of liver failure caused by dietary supplements has risen 185% in the past decade. In the United States, 16% of cases of serious drug-induced liver injury are attributed to dietary supplements. The vast majority are those sold for weight loss and muscle building.
   - Drugs found in supplements for weight loss and muscle building have included:
     - The active ingredient in Meridia, a prescription weight-loss drug pulled from the market in 2010
     - Drugs that have been designed to be chemically similar to methamphetamine (AKA speed)
     - Antidepressants such as fluoxetine, the active ingredient in Prozac
     - Anabolic steroids and precursor chemicals, which can cause young athletes to fail doping tests and have been associated with testicular cancer

3. These products may be abused by people with eating disorders. Experts in the field have raised serious concerns about people with eating disorders abusing diet pills, including orlistat. Orlistat is the only diet pill sold as an over-the-counter drug and approved by the FDA. It was approved for use only in adults 18 years and older, but there are no measures to prevent minors from buying it.
   - Use of diet pills is considered a “disordered weight control behavior” that may reflect an ongoing or developing eating disorder.
   - Banning the sale of diet pills and weight-loss supplements to minors and placing them behind the counter could help prevent misuse and abuse of these products by Massachusetts youth who are struggling with eating disorders.

Massachusetts has a responsibility to protect its youth from potentially dangerous products sold for weight loss and muscle building. Help us keep these products out of kids’ hands!


