



Supporting the health and educational success of children and youth...

March 2, 2017

The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson
Chair, Senate Committee on Health Care

RE: Support for Senate Bill 743 – Relating to dextromethorphan

Dear Chairwoman Anderson and members of the Committee on Healthcare,

We are writing on behalf of Oregon School Nurses Association to express support for S.B. 743, which would prohibit the sale of over-the-counter (OTC) cough medicine containing the ingredient dextromethorphan to those under the age of 18. We commend your committee for sponsoring this legislation, and support the committee's efforts to prevent intentional abuse of dextromethorphan cough medicines.

When used as directed, dextromethorphan is a safe and effective ingredient found in over 100 OTC cough and cold medicines and used by millions of Americans every year. It has no pain-relieving properties and is not physically addictive. However, the 2016 Monitoring the Future Study found that approximately 3 percent of teens abuse medicines containing dextromethorphan to get high. When ingested in high dosages, as much as 25 times the recommended amount, side effects can include confusion, dizziness, double or blurred vision, slurred speech, loss of physical coordination vomiting, rapid heartbeat and potentially, death.

Oregon school nurses have stories of impact to share regarding dextromethorphan abuse. One nurse saw a student who had a seizure after "robo tripping" on dextromethorphan. Another nurse shared that her brother in law died of a dextromethorphan overdose. An issue with dextromethorphan abuse is that person needs to consume more and more of it to continue to achieve the same high. At some point, the person may potentially ingest a fatal dose. Those who ingest dextromethorphan on a regular, long term basis may have permanent psychological issues even with successful treatment.

Teens account for over half of the ER admissions for nonmedical use of dextromethorphan. We can likely decrease this number dramatically if we restrict access to the OTC medication. Oregon has successfully decreased our meth epidemic by limiting access and we can do the same with dextromethorphan access.

Age restrictions provide an effective way to limit access to the small teen population likely to abuse cough medicine. Twelve states – including Alaska, Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington – have passed similar legislation, giving parents greater control over their children's access to medicines.

Addiction is a horrible thing. If we can take a small action to reduce the opportunity for OTC medication drug abuse, we may avoid the addiction nightmare for some families. For these reasons, we lend our support for S.B. 743 and urge the committee to move it forward to help prevent abuse of dextromethorphan by teens in Oregon. Thank you for your consideration and for bringing additional attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

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MESD School Nurse

Kim Bartholomew, RN
Oregon Director, National Association of School Nurses
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