

August 25, 2011

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Senate Bill 514 – Dextromethorphan: sale to minors prohibited

Dear Governor Brown:

This letter is to respectfully request your signature on Senate Bill 514 relative to cold and cough medicines and dextromethorphan abuse by minors.

Senate Bill 514 would prohibit the sale of products containing dextromethorphan to minors without a prescription. Dextromethorphan (DXM) is a cough suppressant commonly found in over-the-counter (OTC) cold and cough medications.

Some consumers, including minors, purchase and consume large quantities of DXM products in order to get high.

When used appropriately dextromethorphan is an effective cough suppressant. When taken at much higher doses, however, it causes hallucinations, loss of motor control, and disassociative "out-of-body" sensations similar to PCP. At still higher doses, dextromethorphan is also a central nervous system depressant and can cause other serious health effects, including: dizziness, blurred vision, nausea, rapid heart rate, paranoia, seizures, brain damage, and heart attack.

These serious adverse health effects may occur from ingesting the contents of just one package of certain OTC cough medications.

Abusing DXM is known by the street names: *Triple-C*, *Dex*, *Red Devils*, *Robo*, *Skittles*, *Tussin*, *Velvet*, and *Vitamin D*. Those who use the cough syrup to get high are sometimes called "*syrup heads*" and the act of abusing DXM is often called "*dexing*," "*robotripping*," or "*robodosing*" (because users chug Robitussin or another cough syrup to get high).

The problem is significant and widespread.

In fact, according to WebMD and the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, one in ten teenagers say they've used DXM to get high—making it more popular than LSD, cocaine, ecstasy or meth.

And the California Poison Control System reports that DXM abuse calls for children under 17 have increased 850% in the last ten years. Further, in 1999 DXM-related abuse calls accounted for 3% of total Poison Control calls in this age group; since 2003, however, this proportion has been over 20% (with a high of 29%); making DXM the most commonly reported substance of abuse in this age group.

Ingesting too much cold medicine can be just as hazardous as drinking too much alcohol or abusing other drugs. Yet it is cheap, easy and legal for children to obtain.

All of which suggests to most young people, and their parents, that these products are entirely safe. Indeed, this false sense of security has been identified as a contributing factor in abuse. An age specific limitation would help communicate to kids (and the adults in their lives) that there are serious consequences associated with inappropriate use.

The bill received bipartisan support in both the Senate (38-0) and Assembly (49-23) and is supported by a broad coalition of organizations, including American College of Emergency Physicians, California State Board of Pharmacy, California Peace Officers Association, California Police Chiefs Association, and the Consumer Healthcare Products Association (the folks who actually manufacture these products).

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I respectfully request your signature on Senate Bill 514.

Sincerely,

S. Joseph Simitian

State Senator, Eleventh District

cc: Nancy McFadden, Executive Secretary
Gareth Elliott, Legislative Secretary
Aaron Maguire, Deputy Legislative Secretary