

December 4, 2017

Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York State
State Capitol
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We, the undersigned organizations, representing a broad group of public health, sportsmen, product stewardship, wastewater treatment, water suppliers, and environmental organizations, respectfully urge you to adopt a manufacturer-funded safe pharmaceutical disposal program in the SFY 2018-19 budget. We thank you for your leadership in providing state funding to significantly expand safe disposal options across New York State in recent years. While progress has been made, many New Yorkers still do not have convenient access to safe pharmaceutical disposal options. With a significant state budget shortfall forecasted for 2018, the pharmaceutical manufacturers should now take responsibility for their product at its end-of-life by organizing and funding a comprehensive pharmaceutical take-back program in New York State.

Mounting evidence demonstrates the need for safe and secure disposal options for pharmaceuticals that match the convenience of purchasing pharmaceuticals. Drugs improperly stored in the home or disposed in the trash may end up in the hands of children, teenagers, and potential abusers. A lack of options to safely dispose of unused drugs is contributing to the national drug abuse epidemic that is now the leading cause of injury death in the U.S., ahead of car accidents. Deaths from drug overdoses and chronic drug abuse in New York State have increased 71 percent between 2010 and 2015.

The lack of disposal options is also perpetuating the antiquated practice of flushing unused or expired drugs, which is polluting our treasured waters across the state with trace amounts of pharmaceutical drugs. Sewage treatment plants and septic systems are not designed to remove these contaminants. While the potential human health effects of pharmaceutical pollution requires additional studies, pharmaceutical drug contamination has been proven to adversely impact fish and aquatic life. According to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, numerous studies have shown impacts on aquatic life. For example, a study in Jamaica Bay illustrated male fish have been feminized (produced eggs) when exposed to hormones (birth control pills).

Throwing pharmaceutical drugs in the trash is also not the answer. Drugs thrown in the trash, even when masked in used coffee grounds or cat litter, can still be accidentally ingested by children or pets or end up in the hands of drug abusers. Additionally, pharmaceutical drugs that are thrown in the trash are often sent to landfills. A recent study by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) found that the presence of pharmaceutical in landfill leachate is widespread.

Leachate is typically treated at wastewater plants which, as previously noted, are not designed to remove pharmaceuticals.

Providing the public with increased access to safe pharmaceutical disposal options, such as drop boxes at pharmacies or police precincts, is the most effective way to prevent accidental poisoning and drug abuse in the home and to prevent flushing and trash disposal. While New York State has made laudable efforts to expand safe pharmaceutical disposal options, many residents across the state still do not have convenient access to safe pharmaceutical disposal. **Additionally, the ongoing disposal programs that do exist are predominantly funded by the taxpayers, while the pharmaceutical industry pays nothing.**

Pharmaceutical Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws provide a sustainable funding mechanism for proper drug disposal by holding pharmaceutical companies accountable for managing their products throughout the entire product life cycle, instead of relying on taxpayers to fund management of these drugs at the products end-of-life. A comprehensive, manufacturer organized and funded pharmaceutical take-back program with strict convenience standards would ensure safe and convenient disposal options for all New York State residents.

In the U.S., eighteen local governments and two states (Massachusetts and Vermont) have passed pharmaceutical EPR laws. This includes Rockland County, which recently became the first local government in New York State to pass this type of law (similar laws have been introduced in Erie and Westchester Counties). Experience has demonstrated that cost to manufacturers is negligible—it is estimated to cost approximately one cent per \$10 of medications sold.

In closing, we respectfully urge you to adopt a manufacturer organized and funded safe pharmaceutical disposal program in your executive budget proposal for SFY 2018-19.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Vice President, Policy
Alliance for the Great Lakes

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Buffalo Audubon Society

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