



## **Citizens Campaign for the Environment**

Empowering Communities, Advocating Solutions

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## **SENATE BUDGET CALLS ON PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY TO FUND SAFE DRUG DISPOSAL IN NEW YORK**

***Diverse coalition calls on Assembly and Governor to follow suit in final budget; Safe drug disposal of unused and expired drugs critical to address opioid crisis and protect waters from contamination***

Albany, NY—A broad group of public health, sportsmen, product stewardship, and environmental organizations are calling on the Governor and Assembly to support the Drug Take Back Act in the final state budget. The Act was included in the New York State Senate’s budget proposal. The legislation would establish a robust, statewide program to provide safe pharmaceutical disposal for all New Yorkers. Pharmaceutical manufacturers, rather than the taxpayers, would foot the entire bill for implementing the program. Chain pharmacies would be required to provide take-back, while other authorized collectors (e.g. independent pharmacies, local law enforcement) would have the option of participating.

Unused drugs stockpiled in household medicine cabinets or disposed in the trash often end up in the hands of children, teenagers, and abusers, which contributes to accidental poisonings and the opioid crisis. 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. The DEA, EPA, and numerous other agencies agree that the safest method of pharmaceutical disposal is through take-back programs (i.e., drug collection drop-boxes hosted by law enforcement and retail pharmacies, mail-back programs, or municipal take-back events).

“New York State and local governments are already spending millions of dollars annually on safe disposal programs, yet far too many New Yorkers still do not have convenient access to safe disposal options,” said Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). “In a year where the state faces a shortfall of over \$4 billion, it is unfathomable that the multibillion-dollar pharmaceutical industry pays nothing to deal with its own waste and taxpayers continue to foot the bill. We are counting on the Governor and Assembly to join the Senate in including this critical legislation in the final budget.”

Wastewater treatment systems and septic systems are not designed to remove these contaminants, resulting in pharmaceutical pollution in waters across the state. Recent studies have shown high levels of antidepressants in fish in the Niagara River and the feminization of male fish (produced eggs) in Jamaica Bay that were exposed to hormones (birth control). Most recently, the Hudson Riverkeeper conducted studies on

pharmaceutical pollution in the Hudson River.

Paul Gallay, President and Hudson Riverkeeper, said: “When Riverkeeper has partnered with scientists to look for pharmaceuticals in the Hudson River, we've found dozens - including some at concentrations that could affect aquatic life. The Drug Take-Back Act would help remove one important source of water contamination, by establishing a program funded by pharmaceutical manufacturers, not consumers or taxpayers. We are calling on the Governor and the New York State Legislature to pass the Drug Take-Back Act and ensure that pharmacies provide drop boxes to make it easy and convenient for people to properly dispose of unused medications.”

“Pharmaceutical companies are best positioned to minimize the adverse impacts of their products,” said Scott Cassel, CEO and Founder of the Product Stewardship Institute. “Through the Drug Take-Back Act, drug companies will fund the safe drug disposal for all New York residents, giving them incentive to reduce the amount of leftover medication.”

"Pharmaceuticals are among many emerging contaminants being found in the Great Lakes and local waterways, posing new and unknown risks to wildlife, ecosystems, and our drinking water. As part of our action agenda for our shared waters, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper will work to minimize the impacts of emerging contaminants and is committed to partnering with government and academic institutions on pharmaceutical take-back programs to keep these contaminants out of our water," said Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper Executive Director Jill Jedlicka.

In the U.S., eighteen counties and two states (Massachusetts and Vermont) have passed similar manufacturer-funded pharmaceutical disposal 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.

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.

"Over 2,000 people in New York die annually from opioid overdose, most commonly from prescription pain relievers. Because 70 percent of people who start misusing drugs get them from the homes of family and friends, the Drug Take-Back Act will save lives by stopping prescription drug abuse at its source," said Andrew Radin, Chair of the New York Product Stewardship Council and Recycling Director for Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency.

While the groups strongly support the Drug Take Back Act, they are also advocating that legislators make important improvements to the proposal before it is finalized in the budget. The groups are calling for the program to require the use of drop-boxes, which have been shown to be the most effective method of collection. The groups are also advocating that a convenience standard is established to ensure equal access for all New Yorkers, and that improvements are made to program reporting and education and outreach.

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*Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE) empowers communities and advocates solutions for our shared environment and public health and is supported by over 80,000 members throughout New York State and Connecticut. [www.citizenscampaign.org](http://www.citizenscampaign.org)*

*updated by bsmith 3/21/18*