

STATEMENT

OF

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ON BEHALF OF THE

NATIONAL COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION

SUBMITTED TO

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY

AT A HEARING

ON

SECURE AND RESPONSIBLE DRUG DISPOSAL

JUNE 18th, 2009

On behalf of the National Community Pharmacists Association (“NCPA”), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today regarding secure and responsible drug disposal. My name is Cheri Garvin and I am a Registered Pharmacist and the Chief Executive Officer of Leesburg Pharmacy, an independently owned community pharmacy located in Leesburg, Virginia, that has been meeting the prescription, medical equipment and related health care needs of the community for over 30 years.

I am here today to provide you with information concerning NCPA’s Protect Your Pharmacy Now! Prescription Disposal Program and issues that must be addressed from the community pharmacy perspective when discussing take back programs. NCPA represents the nation’s independent community pharmacists, including the owners of more than 23,000 pharmacies. The prescription disposal program, launched earlier this year, offers information and resources for pharmacies to create medication disposal programs to help their patients safely dispose of unused and expired medicines that may be dangerous to others and to the environment, including some green programs that convert pharmaceutical waste to energy.

The prescription disposal program was created due to growing concerns regarding how the improper disposal of drugs can lead to prescription drug abuse and drugs in drinking water. The improper disposal of pharmaceutical and personal care products negatively impacts our environment and could lead to greater harm. Unused or expired medications pose risks to our families, communities, and the environment. The program was launched on the heels of reports from the Associated Press on the presence of 271 million pounds of pharmaceuticals released in US waterways that provide drinking water. Other research found that fish caught near

wastewater treatment plants serving five major U.S. cities had residues of pharmaceuticals in them, including medicines used to treat high cholesterol, allergies, high blood pressure, bipolar disorder and depression.¹ Also important to NCPA's decision to offer assistance to our members in creating take back programs is the fact that prescription drug abuse, particularly among younger adults, is drastically rising. We recognize the importance in taking these drugs off the street and properly disposing of them, even though there are significant roadblocks to disposal of controlled substances that I will address shortly.

As part of the program, NCPA members receive access to a free online Prescription Disposal Program toolkit including planning guides, customizable marketing and publicity materials, profiles of community pharmacy disposal programs, as well as resource links and information on state waste programs and potential reverse distribution partners that provide a variety of disposal options.

As active members in the community, pharmacists are in a prime position to ensure the safe and proper handling of medications, from dispensing to disposal. Participating in a medication take back program is a great opportunity for pharmacists to lead the way in pharmaceutical waste disposal that highlights their role as a respected and knowledgeable resource on medications.

As Congress seeks to address the issue of secure and responsible drug disposal, NCPA asks that the following issues be taken into account:

¹ Donn, J., Mendoza, M., & Pritchard, J. (2009, April 20). AP Impact: Tons of Released Drugs Taint US Water. *Associated Press* and Donn, J., Mendoza, M., & Pritchard, J. (2008, March 9). AP Probe Finds Drugs in Drinking Water. *Associated Press*.

- **Convenience for the consumer-** Patients need viable, convenient solutions when seeking to dispose of their unused medications. Programs that allow for drop off at multiple public locations as well as programs that allow for patients to utilize pre-paid mailers to dispose of medications should be encouraged.
- **Legal and Regulatory Feasibility-** Current laws in place that prevent take-back programs from accepting controlled medications, or may prohibit postal carriers from handling mailers containing controlled substances, are impediments and must be addressed in order for programs to succeed. A standard for disposal programs would help to avoid current confusion over how to properly dispose of drugs and other personal care products. Conflicting positions on whether to flush some drugs down the toilet, but not others, for example, are confusing for patients and can deter take back efforts. In addition, participation in take-back programs should be voluntary for community pharmacies and there should be liability protections in place for pharmacies that choose to operate these programs.
- **Program Financing-** Adequate funding is necessary for any drug disposal program to succeed, whether it is through states or grant programs. Pharmacies should not bear the cost burden for these programs as they already provide monies to the states through numerous means.
- **Effective Outreach and Education-** Thorough education for all involved stakeholders is necessary for understanding of a drug disposal program and to ensure that all applicable laws are recognized and respected. Education programs on the proper handling and

disposal of unwanted medications should be designed to allow for maximum participation by all.

In conclusion, NCPA supports efforts to encourage disposal of expired and unwanted medications through appropriately designed drug take back programs. Such programs will assist in deterring abuse and diversion of medications and will foster public involvement in protecting our environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.