



NCL statement on White House pathway for drug importation

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Washington, DC—As the nation’s pioneer consumer organization, the National Consumers League (NCL) strongly supports consumer access to safe, effective, and affordable prescription drugs. The recent announcement by the White House to open a pathway for importation of drugs from outside of the United States seems unworkable and poses safety and purity challenges.

Six years ago, the U.S. government enacted a safe system to “track and trace” drugs sold to U.S. consumers through the Drug Supply Chain Security Act. The law required, that by 2023, all drugs sold to U.S. consumers must have both a product identifier and a unique package code to allow Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and any buyer in the supply chain to obtain a comprehensive history of where the drug was manufactured and packaged. This secure supply chain system best ensures consumers are receiving medications that are not counterfeit or substandard.

“The recent announcement by the White House ignores the Drug Supply Chain Security Act and undermines the security of the U.S. pharmaceutical supply chain,” said Sally Greenberg, NCL executive director. “This new pathway for importation could easily lead to counterfeit or substandard drugs finding their way to consumer’s medicine cabinets, thus putting patient health and safety at risk.”

In addition to the safety risks posed by this new policy announcement, there are no guarantees that it will save consumers money. The proposal opens the door for states, pharmacies, and distributors to obtain the medications outside of U.S. borders, but it does not require that any cost savings from obtaining those “lower-priced” medications be passed on to consumers. So, even if safety concerns could be addressed, it is not clear that there will be any direct cost savings benefit to consumers.

The threat to public health is real. Counterfeit medications may contain the wrong active ingredient, the wrong amount of the active ingredient, harmful ingredients, or even poisons such as

mercury, road tar, or antifreeze. Counterfeit medications made with deadly ingredients have been found in more than 40 states (<https://www.safemedicines.org/2017/09/40-states-and-counting.html>) across America, posing a significant public health threat.

“Allowing importation will only serve to exacerbate the challenge of preventing counterfeit drugs from reaching American patients,” said Greenberg.

NCL continues to advocate for more responsible strategies to ensure the affordability and accessibility of safe and effective prescription drugs.

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About the National Consumers League





The National Consumers League, founded in 1899, is America's pioneer consumer organization. Our mission is to protect and promote social and economic justice for consumers and workers in the United States and abroad. For more information, visit www.nclnet.org.

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