

February 13th, 2020

Dear Senators,

I am writing to respectfully ask you to oppose Senate Bill 119, Expand Canadian Drug Importation Program. I understand how importing prescription drugs from Canada or other countries seems like a simple solution to providing patients with cheaper drugs. I thought the same thing a few years ago and learned firsthand how unsafe it is to get prescriptions filled from outside of the US. I wish I could be here in person to share my story, but my work schedule did not allow me to be at the Capitol today.

My case is just like that of many Coloradans and I write to warn legislators of the dangers of counterfeit, imported medicines and in hopes of preventing others consumers from facing the health problems I experienced.

Like millions of Americans, I suffer from severe allergies that require me to be on prescription medications. A few years ago, I had just started a job as an elementary school teacher and as a result had to change health insurance plans and doctors. The allergy medication that I had taken for years, Allegra, was no longer covered by my new plan. My doctor suggested I could save money by ordering my medicine from an online Canadian pharmacy using a prescription he gave me. It all sounded good to me.

When the package arrived, there were no indications that the pills were anything but the very same medication I had been purchasing at my local pharmacy.

Yet, as I was about to learn – the hard way – they were starkly and dangerously different.

Very soon after I started taking the imported drugs, I became severely ill with migraines, gastrointestinal issues and other symptoms. I was sick for months. My doctors were completely mystified, and since I was supposedly taking the same medicine that had been prescribed for me for years, no one suspected my imported drugs.

Finally, I realized that my symptoms started soon after I received the package of imported pills. I became a more educated consumer and I learned that my story is not unique. It's easy to go online in search of cheaper drugs. However, as I learned horror story after horror story, most online pharmacies are fraudulent and not regulated by either the US or the Canadian government. First of all, these pills could come from anywhere, despite saying they are from Canada. Second of all, I learned that the ingredients are unknown, containing the wrong amount of active ingredients or even deadly fentanyl.

Thankfully soon after I stopped taking the foreign allergy meds, my symptoms went away.

I am one of the lucky ones. My symptoms, although awful and debilitating, weren't life threatening. I was able to discover that the pills were fake and stop taking them, and I have no lasting health effects from these pills.

Others who have innocently taken what they thought were legitimate medications for pain, anxiety or sleep for example, end up dead because even half a pill of a counterfeit pill, often laced with fentanyl, can quickly kill.

The safety concerns around creating legal importation with no way to ensure that what consumers are getting is 100% safe should give pause to legislators. I have become further concerned about the bill being considered this year to expand Colorado's importation program to other countries outside of Canada. The state has yet to inform how, if approved by the federal government, it will implement last year's Senate Bill 5, let alone ensure safety. Why would we risk further dangers to Colorado patients by expanding on that program before concerns have been addressed adequately?

I now know that the drugs that claim to be imported from Canada in reality are just being imported through Canada. The drugs purchased online could start their journey to your home from counterfeit "pill mills" in Asia or in the Caribbean that turn out thousands of fake pills daily. Canadian health officials have said that they have no way to guarantee the quality, safety or effectiveness of medicines that are shipped through their country to the U.S. – and have no intention of starting. And now we are seeking to allow countries shipping counterfeit medications through Canada to ship them directly to Coloradoans.

Colorado leaders who are advocating for drug importation are surely doing so in the hope of making it easier and cheaper for patients to get prescription drugs – just like my doctor did for me. I applaud efforts to make prescriptions drugs more affordable, but this is the wrong approach. I hope that my story will help inform legislators and protect others from similar health scares. I urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 119.

Respectfully submitted,

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