



Building a Safe Harbor for Vermont Elders through Advocacy and Education

**COVE STATEMENT RE SALES TAX ON DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS
4/28/15 - Gini Milkey, Executive Director**

Good afternoon. I'm Gini Milkey, Executive Director of COVE, the Community of Vermont Elders, and we thank you for the opportunity to testify on extending the sales tax to dietary supplements.

COVE's mission is to promote and protect a higher quality of life for Vermont's elders, through education and advocacy. The needs, concerns, safety and well-being of elders who are economically disadvantaged, physically or mentally challenged, or geographically or socially isolated, are a central focus of our public policy work.

Taxing dietary supplements would impose an economic burden on elders living on fixed incomes. COVE strongly opposes doing so.

Many elders use dietary supplements to maintain better health, prevent and treat chronic conditions, or strengthen their immune systems. They also may, especially when working with physicians knowledgeable about nutrition and disease, use supplements in lieu of expensive prescription drugs. We believe that elders may use proportionally more supplements than people in other age groups, and therefore they will be disproportionately impacted by this tax.

It is inconsistent with Vermont's health care reform efforts to discourage financially insecure elders, who struggle to pay for everything, from seeking lower cost treatment alternatives by making beneficial supplements more unaffordable through imposition of a sales tax on them. Just to be clear, ten or twenty dollars a year can make a huge difference to individuals living on the edge financially.

To bring a little specificity to this issue, I have a reactive system and three chronic conditions, and have been able to discontinue and avoid using some expensive prescription drugs, in part through the use of several supplements. In fact, the prescription medication for each of the three conditions has a potential negative effect on one of the others. Through the use of supplements, I have seen improvement in all three conditions.

I took the amount of money I spent in 2014 on supplements, and applied the proposed 6% sales tax to it. If this tax had been in effect last year, it would have cost me nearly \$200 – while by not using certain prescription drugs, I actually saved the health care system several times that.

Elders on fixed incomes and other Vermonters of low income or with chronic illnesses will be hit by this additional tax, and we encourage you to reconsider the proposal.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this issue.