August 10, 2020

Mr. Joshua S. Vinciguerra  
Director Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement  
New York State Department of Health  
150 Broadway Albany, NY 12204

RE: Implementation of the Drug Take Back Act

Dear Mr. Vinciguerra,

We, the undersigned coalition of environmental, product stewardship, public health, wastewater treatment, solid waste management, local government, and fishing organizations, write today with grave concerns about the slow pace of implementation of the Drug Take Back Act.

In November 2019, we provided comments (see attached) on the New York State Department of Health’s (“the Department”) proposed regulations for implementing the requirements of Article 2-B of the Public Health Law regarding the creation of a statewide drug take back program for the safe disposal of drugs.

At that time, we articulated concerns that the Department had missed several deadlines laid out in Chapter 120 laws for 2018. We identified as our first priority the expeditious implementation of this important program.

We appreciate, of course, that the global COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly its impact on New York State, has resulted in unprecedented strain on the Department. We also, however, recognize that the pandemic has exacerbated the opioid epidemic and highlighted the disproportionate impacts that communities of color face from pollution. Implementing the Drug Take Back Act will address both of these critical societal challenges by helping to reduce access to the unused prescription painkillers that too often engender addiction, and reduce the flushing of unused medications that pollute our waterways.

We request that the Department commit to finalizing the regulations necessary to implement the Drug Take Back Act within 30 days.

Sincerely,
Jill Jedlicka
Executive Director
Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper

Brian Smith
Associate Executive Director
Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Barbara Warren RN, MS
Executive Director
Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Maureen Cunningham
Senior Director for Clean Water
Environmental Advocates NY

Chuck Godfrey
Chairman, Environmental Committee
Erie County Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs

Matt Civello
Chair
Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board

Patrick McClellan
State Policy Director
New York League of Conservation Voters

Andrew Radin
Chair
New York Product Stewardship Council

Larry Charette
Chairman
NYS Council of Trout Unlimited

Rob Weltner
President
Operation SPLASH

Scott Cassel
Chief Executive Officer & Founder
Product Stewardship Institute, Inc.

Dan Shapley
Water Quality Program Director
Riverkeeper

Roger Downs
Conservation Director
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

Luann Meyer
President
Solid Waste Association of North America—New York State

Ed Gottlieb
Tompkins County Coalition for Safe Medication Disposal

Carol Smith, MD, MPH
Commissioner
Ulster County Department of Health and Mental Health

Chuck Godfrey
President
WNY Trout Unlimited

cc: Hon. Aileen Gunther
Hon. Todd Kaminsky, Chair, Senate Environmental Conservation Committee
Hon. Steve Englebright, Chair, Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee
Hon. Richard Gottfried, Chair, Assembly Health Committee
Hon. Gustavo Rivera, Chair, Senate Health Committee
Hon. Carl Heastie, Assembly Speaker
Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senate Majority Leader
Hon. Jen Metzger
Kim Harriman, Acting Deputy Secretary for Energy and Environment
Amanda Lefton, First Assistant Secretary for Energy & the Environment
Jennifer Maglienti, Assistant Counsel to the Governor on Energy and Environment
Basil Seggos, Commissioner, NYSDEC
Howard Zucker, Commissioner, NYSDOH