

Dear House Government Operations Committee,

My name is Craig Dwyer and I am a resident of Essex Junction. I want to provide witness testimony for H.549: an act relating to the siting of outdoor cannabis cultivation.

My home at 10 Taft Street is directly adjacent to 8 Taft Street where approximately 100 cannabis plants were cultivated this past May 2023 through October 2023. The overwhelming smell of the plants in an urban neighborhood backyard along a chain-link fence has had a negative impact upon my family's quality of life.

My wife and I had to pay for pavilions multiple times in a public park to host our daughter's 5th birthday party and girl scout meetings. In addition, all of my daughter's friends' parents do not want to have a playdates in our yard due to the close proximity and smell of the cannabis plants. The smell was so potent in our home in August that we chose to go to an Airbnb. Most importantly, my daughters (5 years old and 6 months old) were not able to use our backyard.

On a community level, the outdoor cannabis cultivation operation at 8 Taft Street impacts the 8 children on the block whom range in age from under a year to 9 years old. The children who live on Taft Street must walk past the visible outdoor cannabis to and from the bus stop. In addition, Essex High School is 500 feet from the cannabis growing operation and many high school students walk past it to and from school. The Center for Technology at Essex High School has students year round working on building homes on Taft Street. There is also a walking easement along the backyard property line of my home at 10 Taft Street and 8 Taft Street from Drury Drive for the public to utilize.

All of the neighbors (10 & 6 Taft Street & 43 Drury Drive) bordering 8 Taft Street backyard cannabis cultivation have voiced concerns over the operation impacting our quality of life to the City Council of Essex Junction.

Therefore, I implore you to advocate on our behalf to sponsor H.549.

In summary, I want to be clear my testimony is not about the right to grow cannabis, but the appropriate space for growing in a high populated area. Bill H.549 is not specifically about 8 Taft Street and it is not solely about the City of Essex Junction. H.549 strives to have local municipalities partner with current and future cannabis cultivators to develop community-led guidelines as to where to grow. This bill will allow communities to engage in questions and make decisions as to: is growing cannabis along a public easement, or along a town square, playground, school or daycare facility benefit the public interest?

A current one size fits all state legislation on cannabis cultivation may not currently serve densely populated areas.

Sincerely,
Dr. Craig Dwyer