

Date: May 5, 2024

To: Magali Stowell Aleman

From: Jason Struthers

Subject: H.612 Written Testimony

Madam Chair Ram Hinsdale, and esteemed members of the Committee:

I must say this has been an eye opening and disappointing experience. I have been astonished by the amount of falsely reported information that has been presented to the House and Senate by legislative council, municipal leaders and the "Shepherds" of H.612. Jokes and snickering were made at my expense while discussions transpired about ways to shut down my small farming business. It is disappointing that the complaints of one obviously biased municipality could motivate lawmakers to discriminate against 240 cultivators after 85 years of marijuana prohibition. Cultivators that have contributed a tax base that has already exceeded that of alcohol. Tax revenue that can be used to solve the current crisis surrounding school funding, housing, or the opioid epidemic, for example.

Although there are many beneficial elements to H.612, I am writing to implore you to strike sections 16 and 17 completely before your vote today.

Legislature made the outdoor cannabis cultivation changes in Act 65 (H.270) because several municipalities were establishing rules that prevented outdoor Cannabis cultivation in rural areas.

These changes were necessary because several municipalities have used their authority to discriminate against Cannabis. If you allow any setback citing to exist, you are empowering municipalities to discriminate against a legal plant that is becoming ubiquitous in our society. A plant that not only has recreational value, but a powerful medicine as well.

The Essex Junction City Council President's submitted comments to Senate Econ are atrocious and to be expected from those who willingly or unwillingly keep stigma and discrimination alive. The education deficiency around Cannabis still permeates. Many attempts have been made by Mr. Chawla, Representatives Houghton, Dolan, McCarthy and Biron to demonize my farming operations and vilify me personally. In reality, I am a permanently disabled person that is organically farming fruits, vegetables, and Cannabis. I am the proud father of two teenagers. I have degrees in Biology and Chemistry, and graduated with honors. I provide the cleanest and most nutritious food possible for the community. I also produce medicine that has helped numerous people with relief from a number of indications, or to purge their dependence on opioids. Something to seriously consider while we are amid an opioid crisis.

Essex Junction is the one and only municipality that has provided testimony in regards to outdoor Cannabis cultivation. It is bewildering how the Essex Junction City Council president and the Representatives that support sections 16 and 17 of H.612 (Formerly H.549) can maintain that the municipality is not anti Cannabis or attempting to discriminate.

It is obvious to many in the Cannabis community that the conflation of Cannabis production and a lack of safety is very concerning. This should be a red flag to anyone, especially lawmakers.

It also makes no sense to criticize the use of farm buildings when they are already exempt and pose absolutely no risk. Direct sales of Cannabis will only support the economy in a positive manner while allowing cultivators to reap the same benefits that alcohol producers appreciate.

How could direct sales pose a threat to safety when the rules and models have yet to be determined?

In Essex Junction, the current agricultural district and where the proposed cultivation district for Cannabis is located next to a densely populated, residential area. This is the same area where a sewage treatment plant exists and tons of human biomass are spread every year. A district that exists in the same 4.5 square miles that my farm resides in.

Act 164 was tailored to prevent municipal oversight as it is a problem far too many cultivators have to experience.

“ A municipality shall not: (1) prohibit the operation of a cannabis establishment within the municipality through an ordinance adopted pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 2291 or a bylaw adopted pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4414.”

Cannabis is legal now. The decision has been made to legalize and regulate Cannabis. Cultivators are to be treated fairly and should have the opportunity to grow and not be treated differently. Sections 16 and 17 are clear steps towards regression of the equity that legislation has put in place. My farm is the one and only example in the entire state. Laws are not created to address one problem. If you are to allow any citing on outdoor Cannabis, you will be extending a great disservice to the entire Cannabis community at the same time the Federal Government is in the process of reclassifying.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Jason Struthers
Essex Junction