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Testimony of Delegate Dana Stein in Support of House Bill 510

In 2018, the Maryland General Assembly enacted legislation to establish the Industrial Hemp Pilot Program, administered and regulated by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

Last year, we passed a bill to create the Hemp Farming Program, to both promote the production of hemp and to promote products made from hemp.

Under the Industrial Hemp Pilot program, MDA issued regulations for getting a license. One of the requirements in MDA's regulations is that a hemp grower "(6) Only grow hemp on land that is at least 1,000 feet from a school or public recreation area when the hemp is being grown in an outdoor field or an outdoor site." <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/COMAR/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=15.01.16>.*

Last year, MDA provided licenses to 65 farmers to grow industrial hemp. One of the licensees, in the heart of District 11 in Baltimore County, used 5 acres of a 33-acre farm to grow hemp – on a farm that had been growing vegetables and ornamental trees. While nearly all of the other farms licensed are in rural areas, far from residential communities, this farm is physically adjacent to a dozen or more homes, and has a few hundred homes in close proximity to it.

Last September, my office began receiving many calls and emails from constituents about the strong stench from the farm, which grew more intense until the November harvest. Scores of constituents reported major and chronic impacts, including headaches, sinus infections, asthma, burning eyes, nausea, coughing, sore throat, migraines, sleeplessness, extreme itching, other breathing troubles. These were not minor or inconsequential impacts. They affected the health and

quality of life of residents. And they continued for three months until the hemp was finally harvested in November. Then did the health issues stopped.

Part of the problem was that there was no way to avoid the strong odor. The stench seeped into their homes, cars, clothing, and prevented them from being able to sit outside on a summer evening. Friends and relatives would not visit; children did not want to play outside. It was like being quarantined inside your house, except even there you couldn't escape the smell.

We organized a series of meetings with constituents and the Department of Agriculture, the Health Department, and the Department of Environment. However, the growing of hemp is so new that no one really knows what the health or environmental effects of it may be.

As we looked further into this issue, we realized that this is not an isolated issue. Just Google "hemp, smell complaints" and you will find complaints from around the country. Attached to my testimony is a list of articles from around the country where the smell of hemp has caused health-related concerns and State and local governments to take action to protect their residents.

As the Hemp Farming program is implemented, there will be many more hemp farms. I'm sure some will have the direct impact on communities as has been the case in my district.

But we can mitigate the impact by requiring a buffer between hemp farms and communities. To protect the health and quality of life for my constituents and potentially yours in the future, we should take that action. We created the hemp program; we can make sure that hemp is grown in a manner that's compatible with our communities.