

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 25, 2024

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

We write to follow-up to our August 23, 2023, letter regarding reports of a memo that was produced and circulated by Border Patrol officials over alleged illegal Chinese marijuana growing operations in the state of Maine.¹ Since that time, there have been multiple raids across the state; since the beginning of this year, police have arrested eight people and seized more than 4,400 cannabis plants at four growing sites in Belgrade, China, and Cornville, Maine.^{2,3}

According to the Border Patrol memo, law enforcement in the state have identified 270 suspected properties that have been used as illegal Chinese growing operations, producing an estimated \$4.37 billion in revenue. We applaud Maine law enforcement for their continued efforts to investigate and shutdown these illegal operations, and we encourage the Department of Justice (DOJ) and other federal partners to provide additional support for these efforts. These illegal growing operations are detrimental to Maine businesses that comply with State laws, and we urge the DOJ to shut them down.

Maine towns and legally operated dispensaries have been seeing and feeling the impacts of these illegal operations. While these illegal operations may be secretive, they are often not hard to spot for neighbors in these tightknit communities; the arrests and seizures in Belgrade occurred when state troopers executed search warrants following “community complaints.”⁴ Additionally, court documents from a case in Carmel, Maine, shows that the house rented by one defendant was

¹ Michael Shepherd, “Leaked memo says Maine has hundreds of illegal Chinese marijuana grows worth billions,” Bangor Daily News (Aug. 18, 2023), <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/08/18/politics/leaked-memo-maine-illegal-chinese-marijuana-grows-billions-joam40zk0w/>.

² “Police charge 5 people, seize thousands of plants in illegal pot operations at central Maine residences,” Morning Sentinel (Jan. 2, 2024; updated Jan. 4, 2024), <https://www.centralmaine.com/2024/01/02/police-charge-three-people-seize-970-plants-in-illegal-pot-operation-at-central-maine-residence/>.

³ Christopher Burns, “3 arrested after police bust ‘very well-organized’ illegal marijuana operation,” Bangor Daily News (Jan. 18, 2024), <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2024/01/18/central-maine/central-maine-police-courts/cornville-marijuana-operation-bust/>.

⁴ “Police charge 5 people, seize thousands of plants in illegal pot operations at central Maine residences,” Morning Sentinel (Jan. 2, 2024; updated Jan. 4, 2024), <https://www.centralmaine.com/2024/01/02/police-charge-three-people-seize-970-plants-in-illegal-pot-operation-at-central-maine-residence/>.

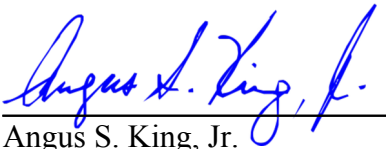
billed \$6,900 a month for power—indicating a large-scale operation.⁵ These illegal operations may be impacting legally run dispensaries that are diligently complying with Maine state laws— one dispensary owner estimates that these illegal growers are selling marijuana for half the price that she purchases product from “by-the-book” growers.⁶ This cost differential is unfair.

While we are glad that Maine law enforcement is making progress to identify and shut down illegal operations, the scale of these reported operations within the state is alarming and requires immediate action. We again reiterate our previous request for additional information about what the DOJ is doing to address this situation. We request answers to the following questions:

1. What is the DOJ doing to address illegal growing operations, including illegal growing operations that are run by foreign governments or entities?
2. These reports identify Chinese ownership. Is the DOJ aware of this alleged Chinese ownership or any other foreign involvement in these operations?
3. Are the profits from these illegal operations being returned to the country of origin? If so, through what mechanisms?
4. Please provide any additional information about the memo identified in these reports, including who produced it, when the information contained in the memo was first obtained, and what actions have been taken in response?
5. What action is the DOJ taking to swiftly shut down any illegal marijuana growing operations in the state of Maine?
6. What support is DOJ providing to Maine law enforcement agencies (state, county, and municipal) as they work to identify and arrest those participating in illicit activity related to illegal marijuana growing operations?
7. What, if any, additional support does DOJ need from Congress to support Maine law enforcement in these efforts?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

⁵ Donovan Lynch, “Illegal marijuana sites dot central Maine amid scant enforcement,” NewsCenter Maine (Nov. 27, 2023), <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/crime/central-maine-sees-multiple-illegal-marijuana-sites-amid-scant-enforcement/97-0dd55f46-e344-49d2-8a7a-d4628c331bcf>.

⁶ *Id.*

Chellie P

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Member of Congress

Jared F Golden

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Cc: Troy A. Miller, U.S. Customs and Border Protection