

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

November 30, 2023

The Honorable Darcie N. McElwee
United States Attorney
District of Maine
100 Middle Street, 6th Floor East
Portland, ME 04101

Dear U.S. Attorney McElwee:

I write to ensure that you are aware of the recent in-depth reporting by the *Maine Wire* regarding “more than 100 properties” it identified as being “part of a sprawling network of Chinese-owned sites operating as unlicensed, illicit cannabis growing operations in rural Maine.”¹ This follows earlier reporting that a “leaked government memo says there are 270 marijuana growing sites in Maine that are linked to China and could produce more than \$4 billion in revenue.”² I have heard from numerous constituents who are concerned about how these illicit operations are adversely impacting the safety and security of their communities.

On August 23, 2023, I joined other members of the Maine congressional delegation in writing to Attorney General Merrick Garland on this topic.³ In that letter, we asked a series of questions about what the Department of Justice is doing to address this situation and urged the Department to take all appropriate steps to shut down these illicit operations. We have yet to receive a response to that letter. I also met with Anne Milgram, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, on November 16, 2023. During that meeting, we discussed the illegal marijuana growing operations in Maine and the potential harm they pose to our public health and national security.

While any illicit drug operation is alarming, this situation is particularly noteworthy given the potential involvement of Chinese transnational criminal organizations engaged in human

¹ Steve Robinson, *Triad Weed: How Chinese Marijuana Grows Took Over Rural Maine*, *Maine Wire* (Nov. 8, 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/39c7z7p2>.

² Michael Shepherd, *Leaked memo says Maine has hundreds of illegal Chinese marijuana grows worth billions*, *Bangor Daily News* (Aug. 18, 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/y7pysktv>.

³ Letter from the Maine Congressional Delegation to Attorney General Merrick B. Garland (Aug. 23, 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/4ppsy6tx>.

trafficking, money laundering, and other serious crimes.⁴ This occurs in the context of serious concerns being raised regarding large Chinese land purchases in the United States.⁵ The potential national security risks are readily apparent.

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for all that you do on behalf of the people of our State. I continue to urge the Department of Justice, including your office, to take all appropriate actions to ensure these criminals can no longer operate in Maine.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Merrick B. Garland, Attorney General of the United States
The Honorable Anne M. Milgram, Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration

⁴ See Liyan Qi, *How Chinese Marijuana Operations Cropped Up in Small-Town America*, The Wall Street Journal (Nov. 30, 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/3kzstyvu>.

⁵ See Lars Erik Schönander & Geoffrey Cain, *China is Buying the Farm*, The Wall Street Journal (Sept. 8, 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/yp33cnsa>; Kayla Bailey, *Experts sound alarm over China buying U.S. land near military bases*, FoxBusiness (Feb. 6, 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/4xks7p42>.