

Melinda Hull  
South Portland

My name is Melinda Hull and I live at 44 Kaler Road in South Portland.

In 2015, I came back to Maine after nearly 22 years away, to contribute my talents and energy to the local economy and to start a family. In all those years away, when people would ask where I was from, I would proudly say Maine. People were often intrigued. With a full heart and a thoughtful mind, I would explain about our way of life, how we care about each other, how neighbors generally look out for each other, and how we are bound together by our reliance on and appreciation for the land, water, and air that sustains us and so many who visit with us year after year.

When I first returned to South Portland and lived on Grand St, in the morning sometimes I would notice a smell, sometimes a little sweet, sometimes a little more noxious, but always nauseating. I knew what it was: they were doing something with the oil tanks. "They" were the companies who were my neighbors in Ferry Village or over in Pleasantdale.

My daughter Carly, who was then 1.5 years old, started attending a childcare center in Spring 2018 in the Ligonja neighborhood. In the mornings, as we headed to daycare, we'd turn onto Lincoln street with windows rolled down, singing songs. On many, many days after making the turn, especially in better weather, my throat would start to burn. Quickly I would roll up the windows and switch the air circulator to avoid pulling in outside air. The fumes from that area would choke us. The air smelled like a mix of petroleum and asphalt. We couldn't sing anymore, and I'd tell Carly to put her blanket or other clothing item over her nose and mouth to filter out the fumes.

Often, she and her classmates could not go outside due to the fumes. Hourly, those fumes entered her school's air ventilation system, no matter the weather or season. Teachers started to have headaches and chronic respiratory issues. The other daycares and schools nearby were all dealing with the same issue. I learned this because I tried to find Carly another place to attend daycare. We all know that these fumes are not safe. Our bodies tell us they aren't, science tells us they aren't. Why do our neighbors want to do this to us and our kids? Why are we letting them?

All we are asking is for our neighbors- any of the handful of fuel companies who operate among us - all we are asking is for them to be good neighbors. Accurately monitor what they are emitting, how much, and take steps to mitigate air pollution put into the neighborhoods and cities we all live in and work in together. Just as we would with any other resident or business whose activities are endangering the wellbeing or health of another resident or their property - please help us hold our neighbors accountable. Please support efforts to better regulate, monitor, and test emissions coming from the tank farms around Maine. The future of our children's health – and this state - depends on it.