

August 25, 2022
Robert Shobe, Public Comment
Congressional Field Hearing, Detroit
Oversight Committee's Environment Subcommittee

Good morning Committee Members, congressional staff and those gathered here today. Thank you for opportunity to speak. My name is Robert Shobe and I've lived on Beniteau St. for 27 years. My home is one of the closest to the Stellantis plant where they assemble and paint the new Jeep Grand Cherokee. My life has been deeply impacted by living next to Stellantis.

Most importantly, I want to share that it is still happening. Even after five air quality violations, after entering into an enforcement process, after appealing to elected officials and decision makers it is still happening. I call EGLE frequently. I try to call every time I smell the paint, but I don't go outside as much these days. The last time I called was Monday, August 22. There has been no interruption of work, Jeeps continue to get sprayed and roll off the line daily.

This plant is making us sick. I'm a cancer patient, I'm physically disabled, and I suffer from COPD. When the smell comes down around my house my eyes burn. I've had a cough from smelling the paint. I feel a tightness in my chest and have gotten headaches from the smell. I have been living as a prisoner in my own home for well over a year.

And it's not just me... one of my neighbors has shared **"When my eyes start to burn, I start to become more afraid of all the things I can't smell than those that I can"** Another neighbor shared **"The migraine headaches, and the burning in the eyes, and tightness in my chest... I just know when I'm out too long, I get that way, but I can't say today is going to be worse than tomorrow. I know yesterday it was just too much. I was crying."**

Source Title VI Complaint: <https://www.detroitpeoplesplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Beniteau-MI-EGLE-Title-VI-Complaint.pdf>

The psychological impact of not knowing what you are being exposed too and having others tell you it's safe when you and your neighbors are getting sick is really rough and mentally draining. I've done some research and have communicated with experts in the field. I have enough information to know they have not done a true sampling of the air. They have not done enough to know for certain what we've been exposed to, let alone the potential interaction of emissions.

At a January meeting with EGLE, MHHS and Stellantis reps, an art teacher from a local soup kitchen asked if it was safe for students to be outside. She had a young child experience an asthma attack in the community garden when the smell was present and was concerned. Brandon Reid from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services responded, **“About the asthma side of things, that’s a really hard question, and I don’t think I can make that kind of assessment right now about, you know, whether you should have classes outdoors or not. The asthma part of things, those can be triggered by odors, and that’s one of the concerns we have with the odors.”** Source: <https://www.freep.com/story/money/cars/chrysler/2022/01/28/stellantis-jeep-plant-detroit-odors-paint/9250421002/>

The unfortunate fact is that those of us that live around this plant have the highest asthma hospitalization rates in the city and that nearly doubles any asthma rates across the state. If the state health department can’t make an assessment about the safety of outdoor classes for kids, what does that mean for those of us who live right up on it?

This brings us back to the failure of the decision makers to consider us, the people who live around the plant as they were approving this project. In addition to high asthma rates, many in our community live in extreme poverty and don’t have the resources to protect themselves from continuous exposure to Stellantis’ fumes.

That’s one of the reasons some of my neighbors and I filed a Civil Rights complaint in November of 2021. The situation we are living in needs to be considered when these decisions are being made. Our community has been ignored by the city for the last at least 30-35 years. There has been disinvestment in our neighborhood for a long time and now Stellantis is using tax schemes that will continue to capture funding for schools, libraries, recreation centers or things that would make a vibrant community for another 30 years.

EGLE did not consider the existing health issues of residents, high poverty, cumulative impacts of Stellantis and other polluters on the east side, like the chemical waste processing companies on Lyncaster Street and US Ecology. They need to look at the big picture and consider how things will interact. It is also important to note that though we have been extremely vocal we have had very little support from elected officials and other departments and groups who bear responsibility for our long-term exposure to whatever it is that we are breathing.

The City’s Civil Rights, Inclusion and Opportunity Department (CRIO) monitors the Community Benefit Agreement between the city and Stellantis. The only official way to file a complaint with CRIO is through the project’s Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC). In response to a complaint filed by the NAC, they deferred the issue to the State and noted that Stellantis is in compliance with the CBA. The city’s Law Department and Enforcement Committee reasserted their compliance.

The Detroit City Council has failed to take meaningful action and it is important to note that Andre Spivey, who was our council member while the deal was made is now in jail due to corruption. He failed to represent our interest during this process.

Mayor Duggan has been a major catalyst for the issues we are experiencing. Our community has been disregarded. He has put jobs in front of the health of the residents. Last year at a community meeting I attempted to address the Mayor directly about these issues, but instead of answering me, he disregarded me and told me that I'd be writing him a thank you note when I sold my house for a nice profit. It's online here: <https://vimeo.com/564391189> Rather than address the situation the mayor has pitted residents against residents and is attempting to shift the focus to blight on the street rather than air quality, our health and Stellantis responsibility.

We seem to be caught between the States failures in permitting, monitoring, and sampling and our local elected officials' failure to hold Stellantis accountable and deferral back to the state. While caught here we are still breathing these fumes and still getting sick so I appreciate this opportunity to share more in an attempt to get better outcomes for my neighbors and myself.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Spivey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Spivey".