

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

SENATOR EDWARD J. KENNEDY
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July 10, 2019

The Honorable Adam G. Hinds, Senate Chair
The Honorable Mark J. Cusack, House Chair
The Joint Committee on Revenue
Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

Re: S.1691, An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture

Dear Chairman Hinds and Chairman Cusack,

I appreciate the Joint Committee on Revenue considering **S.1691, An Act to promote urban agriculture and horticulture**, which creates an optional property tax exemption aimed at alleviating one of the most common hurdles standing in the way of expanded agricultural opportunity in Gateway Cities.

Across the Commonwealth, urban agriculture and horticulture have helped transform neighborhoods and have proven to be credible forces in their revitalization. In locations where once underutilized lots have been reinvented as urban farms, communities have seen improved access to affordable and healthy food that reflects their distinct cultural needs, renewed economic opportunity, and enhanced environmental sustainability derived from the ability of agricultural space to reduce stormwater runoff and improve local air quality.

In the last decade, urban agriculture has emerged as an indispensable component in the civic fabric of Lowell. As a result of the steady resolve and ingenuity of Mill City Grows, a non-profit organization in the city, Lowell now has three urban farms. These farms, along with other initiatives undertaken by Mill City Grows within the urban agriculture space, have become focal points of nutritional awareness, helped address health inequities by making healthy food accessible to low-income residents, and have rejuvenated our neighborhoods, improving the overall quality of life in our city along the way.

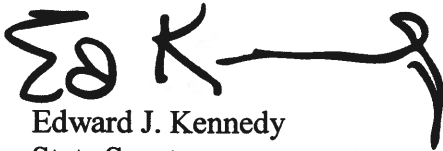
Despite the demonstrated value of urban agriculture initiatives, the potential of this proven source of revitalization often remains unfulfilled in our Commonwealth's Gateway Cities due in large part to the cost of acquiring land. This bill would serve to address this barrier by providing

a new tool to municipalities in the form of an optional tax exemption of up to 100 percent on parcels of less than two acres that are intended for agricultural or horticultural use. Enabling the adoption of a property tax exemption of this nature would be valuable both to cities seeking to repurpose vacant or underutilized space in an innovative way, and to individuals considering developing an urban farm who might otherwise be deterred by financial factors. Importantly, the bill allows participating municipalities to set the percentage of the assessed value of eligible property that is exempt from taxation, ensuring that the incentive can be tailored to fit the needs of the communities where it is in use.

The ability of Gateway Cities to reach their full potential demands a multifaceted approach towards economic development and revitalization. The example of Lowell demonstrates the capacity of urban agriculture and horticulture to be a vital component to the health, well-being and overall prosperity of a city. S.1691 would help grow this success in communities that have already embraced urban agriculture, and expand its value to communities that have yet to experience its benefits. For this reason, I hope that the committee will report favorably on the bill.

I appreciate your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at 617-722-1630 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Kennedy', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Edward J. Kennedy
State Senator
First Middlesex District