Seattle church says pot store is too close for comfort

By Josh Green
King5.com | October 5, 2014

SEATTLE – A church congregation that is just feet from Seattle's second pot store took to the streets Sunday to protest its opening.

"We've done everything we can to let them know we're not pleased with the absolute disrespect and disregard for the institute of church," said Rev. Reggie C. Witherspoon, Sr., Pastor of Mount Calvary Christian Center. "You have 3 youth organizations within a stone's throw and somehow they let these people do this. Shame on Seattle!"

More than 100 people packed the sidewalk in front of Uncle Ike's Pot Shop, which opened Tuesday. The protest prompted Seattle police to close off 23rd Ave. out of safety concerns.

At one point Seattle City Councilman Bruce Harrell took the bullhorn and spoke to the crowd.

"This was not supposed to happen," he said. "The state has said a thousand feet from a park. A thousand feet from a licensed daycare center. A thousand feet from an arcade. So we are to believe we hold an arcade in a higher esteem than a sanctified church?"

He also expressed concern for the area's youth.

"We can't have our children walk 3 feet from a dispensary to see that temptation," he added.

KING 5 tried repeatedly to reach store owner Ian Eisenberg for comment Sunday, but he wasn't available. However, in an interview earlier in the week, he answered questions about the controversy surrounding the new shop and its location.

"I own the property and the zoning fit," he said. "It follows the federal guidelines of where cannabis shops are supposed to be."

He also spoke about risk to the area's youth.

"I think the whole idea of I-502 was to have a legal framework and a regulated market that'll help drive out the black market," Eisenberg said. "A street dealer will sell to anybody. They'll sell to kids. But a store like this you have to be 21 to even walk inside."

Rev. Witherspoon said he has written the governor, the mayor, and has filed a complaint with the Washington State Liquor Control Board expressing the congregation's concerns. Church members said Sunday they will continue protesting each Sunday for the near future.

"As this country is looking at what this whole new infrastructure may look like, we're going to send a message," Rev. Witherspoon said. "It's an atrocity. We're upset. You have to shut this place down!"