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September 29, 2021

The White House  
President Joseph R. Biden  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

Thank you for giving us an audience.

We all know that a home is more than the brick and mortar that makes a building. A home is the place that you have toiled and sacrificed to create. The style and size of your home does not matter, it is the protected sacred place you created to feel comfortable and be at peace.

One month ago, to this day, thousands of Louisianans lost their homes due to the uncontested winds of Hurricane Ida. The destruction and loss of material things has been great but if the hurricane force winds lasted just one hour more, many of us may not be here to tell the tale.

The unfortunate loss, volatility, and uncertainty that many are now experiencing has become all too familiar for residents in St. James, Louisiana and throughout the River Parishes.

Are you able to imagine how we feel under the present threat of industrial businesses in our backyards?

As the storm came ashore, disaster capitalism started to rage. Practices and political agendas that would normally be frowned upon have gone unnoticed. At Rise St. James, we continue to watch, fight, and pray. As a result of Hurricane Ida, the same communities are already burdened by pollution air quality due to power outages; nearly 350 oil spills; gas flares throughout the region; flares blown out allowing for chemical release; dock breached by a vessel; and more.

A monstrous \$700 million steel facility located right here in St. James Parish is the largest facility of its kind in the world. Our communities get the spoils of the company's success. The facility purifies iron ore of oxide to make metal for end use. For almost a decade the company has released sulfuric acid mist and hydrogen sulfide among other permit violations without residents being made aware. In several incidents, plant operators and state regulators

were also not aware that these harmful releases in high concentrations could lead to severe injury and death. The same company planned an aggressive \$100 million dollar expansion, but after the work of Rise St. James and its partners, on July 27th, the company withdrew its Title V permit application. Rise St. James will not give up. When can we expect the support of the local government?

Like Hurricane Ida, major storms are approaching faster with less time to prepare. According to Governor John Bel Edwards's Climate Initiative Task Force, 66% of our carbon emissions in our state come from industry more than anywhere else in the country. This makes storms and the climate crisis harder to bear. Also Rise St. James echoes the sentiments of Congressman Troy Carter in his August 15, 2021, news release regarding resources, monitoring, and action on environmental justice in Cancer Alley. "The collection of independent, reliable data will allow federal, state, and local governments to make informed decisions to better the public health of our community as a whole," writes Congressman Carter.

Despite all the loss and devastation, we are committed to rebuild resilient communities and look forward to continued relief. We imagine an eco-rebuild in St. James and throughout the River Parishes. Here is what we need help with:

- Public health and local government infrastructure
- Reinforce the importance of democracy in local government
- Modern infrastructure resilient to climate change
- Climate change adaptation and education
- Transit funding and reconnecting neighborhoods
- Solar energy in public and emergency spaces
- Protect cultural and national heritage

We appreciate you standing on the side of descendant communities and supporting environmental justice. It is our prayer that existing industrial businesses can operate cleaner. As always, we welcome everyone to walk together with us, reclaim our community, and embrace a reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world.

Respectfully yours,



Sharon Lavigne  
President, 2021 Goldman Prize Recipient

P.S.

I will be visiting Washington, DC between October 11th and 15th of 2021. I humbly request an in person meeting with you.

cc:

Congressman Troy Carter, United States House of Representatives  
Secretary Peter Buttigieg, United States Department of Transportation