



The Descendants Project Announces Support of Key Environmental Legislation

February 7. Wallace, LA. The Descendants Project, a nonprofit organization committed to eradicating the legacies of slavery for black descendant communities especially fighting pollution within Louisiana's "Cancer Alley" announced its support for the Environmental Justice For All Act. Sponsored by Chair Raul M. Grijalva and Representative A. Donald McEachin," the legislation is rooted in the moral principle that all people have the right to pure air, clean water and an environment that enriches life."

Residents within Louisiana's cancer alley, an 83-mile stretch of highway along the Mississippi River inundated by petrochemical and heavy industry, endure cancer risks higher than 95% of the country. Plants and manufacturing facilities are often located on the former sites of plantations. Black neighborhoods and "freetowns", which are often on the perimeter of plantations, are now "fenceline" communities overburdened by the pollution from the facilities. Consequently, Black communities experience a disproportionate amount of exposure to carcinogens, PM 2.5, and even damage to homes and personal property. According to Dr. Joy Banner, one of the founding directors of The Descendants Project, " This legislation will amend and strengthen Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which will prohibit discrimination based on the disparate impact we endure as Black, fenceline communities. The act will also hold companies accountable by allowing those of us impacted to seek legal remedy when they discriminate against us."

Another key feature of the legislation includes cumulative impacts, which requires consideration of the cumulative impacts in permitting decisions under the clean water and clean air act and ensures that permits will not be issued if the project cannot demonstrate reasonable certainty of no harm to human health.

Residents and EJ groups within cancer alley have highlighted the loophole whereby the heavy burden of pollution is not taken into consideration when evaluating the potential harm to the community from a new permit applicant. "It's like pouring water into a glass that's already two-thirds full, but not taking into account the water that's already in the glass. The glass can't handle the water, just like our bodies can't handle the pollution." Says Banner.

The Descendants Project is in their own fight for environmental justice; the foundation is suing St. John the Baptist Parish for illegal industrial zoning that is still on the books from the 1990's. The Parish President at the time served five years in federal prison for corruption and taking a bribe to rezone the land for Formosa. The illegal zoning is now being used by Greenfield, Louisiana LLC to plan a massive grain terminal that would inundate the community with more harmful dust, pollution, and emissions.

According to Banner, "It's vital to our survival that we have federal legislation to hold states accountable for the protection of our environment and our health. We know from personal experience that without oversight, our states are not doing their due diligence to keep us safe. What more proof do you need than "Cancer Alley?"

Through programming, education, advocacy, and outreach, The Descendants Project is committed to reversing the vagrancies of slavery through healing and restorative work. We aim to eliminate the narrative violence of plantation tourism and champion the voice of the Black descendant community while demanding action that supports the total well-being of Black descendants. Visit thedescendantsproject.com to learn more or to donate.