



For Immediate Release

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### **Concerned Citizens of St. Tammany Files Motion to Intervene in Baton Rouge Lawsuit on Zoning Laws and Fracking in St. Tammany Parish**

**Baton Rouge, LA:** Today, Concerned Citizens of St. Tammany filed a motion to intervene in a lawsuit, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, between St. Tammany Parish and the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The original case was split into several actions and CCST is asking to intervene in all. The cases ask the Court to review St. Tammany Parish zoning laws and DNR's decisions relative to a Helis Oil & Gas Company (Helis) proposal to develop the first hydraulic fracturing operation also known as "fracking", to drill for oil and gas, in St. Tammany Parish.

"These lawsuits are very important and address St. Tammany Parish's ability to exercise fundamental rights granted to it under the Louisiana State Constitution and the Parish's Home Rule Charter," said Rick Franzo, President of CCST. Franzo continued, "The Parish government should have a right to control land use and protect St. Tammany residents against the many risks associated with fracking. CCST hopes that the Court grants our request to intervene to actively protect our interests in these precedent-setting matters."

CCST believes that the Parish has the authority to impose a ban on fracking to protect the citizens from potential health and other ecological risks; the lawsuit asks the Court to recognize that authority. Coincidentally, just minutes after CCST filed their motion to intervene, news came that in New York State, Governor Cuomo's administration announced that it would ban fracking due to concerns over health risks. New York officials concluded that fracking, could contaminate the air and water and pose inestimable dangers to the public health.

CCST was specifically formed to represent the rights and concerns of St. Tammany Parish residents in civic matters, processes and actions, such as the current lawsuits. CCST's primary mission is to promote transparent, responsible, and effective government. The group has a history of advocacy and integral involvement with zoning and other civic

matters in St. Tammany Parish, and has spent an estimated \$500,000 and a tremendous amount of time participating in and tracking the development of Helis' proposal for a fracking project in St. Tammany Parish. Helis successfully intervened in the same lawsuits a few weeks ago. CCST felt compelled to file to intervene as well, to protect residents' rights and voice concerns.

Marianne Cufone, attorney for CCST said. "The organization over time has clearly displayed its right and interest to participate in the decision-making process about fracking in the Parish, and as a representative of local property owners and taxpayers, CCST should be a part of these lawsuits."

All the parties already involved in the cases agreed not to oppose CCST's request to intervene, except Helis. CCST hopes Helis will tell the Court it will not oppose the motion to intervene in the coming days. CCST filed the motion to intervene today without Helis' consent, to avoid delay in the cases.

As an intervenor, CCST would support St. Tammany Parish's requests in the lawsuit. Specifically the organization is asking the Court to decide several things:

1. Require DNR to give St. Tammany zoning ordinances primary consideration when issuing permits. The property on which the fracking project is proposed is currently zoned residential - not industrial - which would likely mean the need for a zoning change to allow the project to go forward, or this could stop the project entirely;
2. Stop DNR from issuing any other orders to allow joining parcels of land, called "unitization", until certain legal requirements are met. Unitization was the first step in creating the parcel of land where the fracking would take place; and;
3. Declare that St Tammany Parish has the ability to ban fracking in the Parish.

Franzo said, "CCST is committed to representing and protecting St Tammany Parish residents' rights and interests in this matter with Helis' proposed fracking project and we are ready and willing to be involved in this and other lawsuits, as necessary."

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