

## Testimony for 9/14/22 Hearing

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In August of 2021, as a single mom of 6 working as a paraprofessional for the local school board, I was nervous and scared when hearing the news that we would have to evacuate our low income section 8 housing because of a predicted hurricane. I kept watching Social Media to see if everyone was evacuating because in Southwest Louisiana we get so many hurricane predictions that we don't take them all seriously. When I saw my local weather man say he was evacuating I knew it was time to go. I evacuated to Mississippi, where my Grandmother lives, and eventually we headed back home to assess the damage from the hurricane. A friend who had been able to get back home before me told me that a tree had fallen on the roof and my back door was blown in. Therefore, I expected to see damage but wasn't prepared for all the devastation I would encounter.

**As I entered Southwest Louisiana I immediately saw destruction.** Everything had been affected by Hurricane Laura. I was in tears and so were my children. We went to our home briefly but had to leave before dark because there was no lights, water or gas for our vehicles. We headed to Houston. We ended up staying in a hotel in Houston for several weeks but we'd go home daily to try and clean the house a little bit. During this time I had no money. The little money I had saved had been spent during the pandemic that we were also in the midst of. I received help from people on Facebook and from churches. When we finally were able to go home our house was unlivable, so we again had to stay in a hotel. As soon as we were in a routine and the kids had been in a school a few days, Hurricane Delta was forecast. **What we didn't lose in Laura we lost in Delta.** Again we stayed in a hotel. I finally made the decision to just live in our damaged home because driving back and forth from Houston was too much. Because I moved back in my damaged home I couldn't get help from FEMA so I moved in with my sister.

A few months later **Winter Storm Uri** was predicted. I said enough was enough. I had seen Facebook posts of how people were struggling trying to get their lives back together and some folks had not been able to come home since the first evacuation. Southwest Louisiana residents were scattered all around the US because 2 hurricanes had completely devastated our homes. Even today, people are still in FEMA trailers or have blue tarps on their roofs from hurricanes 2 years ago.

I knew I needed to help people. I took to the streets to see who I could help. I went door to door. I walked up to tents and campers. I asked folks what they needed. Everyone needed something different but the resounding answer was they wanted their homes back. I couldn't give them a home but because of the stimulus checks we had recently gotten I could put some people in a hotel to keep them from freezing to death. So that's what I did. From that I started my mutual aid organization The Vessel Project of Louisiana. I ended up putting over 300 people in hotels all through crowd sourcing on Social Media. After Winter Storm Uri I continued to help folks with direct cash assistance.

A few months later, **a record-breaking flood hit Lake Charles, called a hundred year flood.** During that flood I lost the car that I had gotten to replace the one I lost due to the hurricane because I was out helping people. I had to be rescued from my car. And after that, we were hit by **tornadoes**. The citizens of Lake Charles are not used to being hit by tornadoes.

**After so many major disasters so close together people started asking -- what's going on? Why are so many storms coming here? Why are they so close together? Why are they so intense?** The answer was simple. Climate change.

Who contributes to the warming of our climate? That's the oil and gas industry. And in Southwest Louisiana, we have so many oil and gas refineries and LNG export facilities. They build facilities in areas that are very poor and predominantly black, communities of color that are already struggling, already have health risk, already don't have safe drinking water. They come with promises of good jobs, giving us more money to invest in our communities and they do the exact opposite. When you go through the parking lots of LNG facilities, you don't see Louisiana license plates, you see Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia – because they don't want to build up the communities they're in. Because when you give people money, you give them power.

The oil and gas industries not only extract fossil fuels, they extract homes, lives, and our livelihoods. They extract our clean air and our clean water and emit toxic pollution that poisons our air and makes our waters unsafe to fish and to swim. We are a Sportsman Paradise and can't enjoy the sport of fishing because there's a fish eating advisory in some of our waters. This has had a big impact on the fishing and crabbing industries. And there are not good enough safety measures to protect us from explosions and leaks – which become even more common as our storms and hurricanes increase in frequency and intensity.

Coastal erosion is real and the Gulf Coast is eroding quickly due to climate change and industry buildout into the wetlands. Our wetlands are our storm surge protection and as they disappear we have worse flooding. Industry is proposing several more projects, especially LNG export facilities, but we simply can't take anymore. Enough is enough. We are not a sacrifice.