



Letter to Editor

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Dear Editor,

Cancer Alley isn't just a "catchy phrase." I live in Cancer Alley and every day I deal with the effects. I'm a life-long resident of St. James Parish, and my roots here go all the way back to the time of slavery, when my ancestors worked the fields that are now being paved over with chemical plants. I love my community. But, over the four decades of my life, I have witnessed the things I love about St. James – my local school, family-owned grocery stores, homes passed down through generations – being replaced by polluting industry. I have watched my father and grandfather suffer from cancer and COPD, attended too many funerals for cousins that died of cancer, and spent sleepless nights worrying about the health of my son, who was diagnosed with asthma when he was 8 years old. So when I read your April 15, 2021 editorial, where you dismissed concerns about Cancer Alley based on "science" and "data," I knew I had to speak up. As a healthcare worker, I know the importance of science and data. The best available data for health risks from pollution in Cancer Alley comes from the Environmental Protection Agency. If you look at a map of EPA's National Air Toxics Assessment, you will clearly see that the area between Baton Rouge and New Orleans lights up red for high cancer risk from air pollution. And it's not just about cancer. Our region lights up red for risk of respiratory problems like asthma and COPD. The EPA data shows that Cancer Alley exists –

it's a stretch of mostly Black communities (like mine) between Baton Rouge and New Orleans where people are overburdened with risks of cancer and other health problems from industrial pollution. This is undeniable. Just look at the EPA data. The March 2019 Louisiana Tumor Registry report that you talked about doesn't measure pollution. In fact, the FAQ section of that report has a question: "Does Cancer Alley Exist?" The answer: "Given the data items routinely collected by the Louisiana Tumor Registry (LTR), this question cannot be answered." In other words, the Tumor Registry report doesn't say anything about the health effects of pollution exposure because, unlike the EPA, the Tumor Registry doesn't measure pollution. This is undeniable. Just look at the Tumor Registry report. Readers should also know that the latest Tumor Registry report, from March 2021, shows that Census Tract 405 in St. James – where I live and where Formosa Plastics wants to build – has a 20% higher cancer rate versus the state average. So even by Louisiana standards, our community is overburdened with cancer. And my own family members are part of that statistic. Now Formosa Plastics would put extra health risks on my family, friends, and neighbors, who are already overburdened with cancer and respiratory disease. Formosa Plastics is permitted to release almost 100 tons of carcinogens (cancer-causing chemicals) and 800 tons of toxic pollutants into the air every year. According to the CDC, there is no safe level of exposure to a carcinogen. This is undeniable. Just look at CDC's website. Diet and lifestyle might be the most important cancer risk factors for most Louisianans. We are not most Louisianans. We are small, Black communities overshadowed by industrial plants. Our health problems won't show up in state or even parish statistics because we make up a small fraction of the population. But that's the whole point. The burden of pollution is not spread evenly. Instead, a huge amount of toxic air pollution is dumped on small Cancer Alley communities like mine, while most Louisianans breathe clean air. Even in St. James Parish you can see the burden is not fair. When I look out my backyard, I see pipelines, tanks, and smokestacks. What do you see when you look out your back yard?

Chasity White

RISE St. James