My name is Jo Banner, I am the co-founder of a NGO in Louisiana called The Descendants Project. You may know Louisiana for its Mardi Gras, Gumbo, and jazz. But just outside New Orleans in my community of Wallace, we are known for something else - And that is Cancer. I live in a region known as Cancer Alley where the risk of a cancer diagnosis is 95 times higher than any other place in the United States.

As our economy moved from plantations to mostly petrochemical plants, the exploitation of the enslaved Africans was replaced by the exploitation of their descendants, such as myself, literally on the same land that holds the bones of our enslaved ancestors who could not leave even in death.

Our air, water, and land is filled with chemicals belched out by petrochemical companies that produce the toxic material to make plastics. As there is no separation between water and wetness, there is no separation between toxic and plastic. If plastic can be produced without toxins, then why isn’t it already being produced that way? The people suffering and dying in Cancer Alley would like to know.

The state of Louisiana has sold-out our health, not only to the highest bidder- but to any bidder. And international organizations are complicit in the demise of our health as we suffer the consequences.

We demand the separation of business and state. Industry should no longer have unlimited access to policy and decision makers while communities are left out. Industry has captured our government officials, who then curtail our rights on their behalf. We’ve witnessed, even here, the false information, ridiculous and dangerous conclusions, and flimsy excuses from industry that are then repeated and sometimes acted upon without minimal fact-checking. Our public servants who are supposed to serve us, instead serve the powerful.

I am frustrated with the continual lifelines given to those involved in the production of plastic. I ask you to give that lifeline instead to the communities of Cancer Alley and other communities around the world who suffer tremendously from upstream production by rejecting the narrative that plastic

1) is necessary and
2) can be produced or recycled safely

In addition, we ask for an inclusion of moratoriums on the production of dangerous chemicals in areas overburdened by upstream production of toxins used in plastic production.

I’ll conclude with this - Plastic pollution does not “leak” into our bodies and environment. Too many countries permit plastic to be placed there. And it must be stopped.