BEFORE THE
GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Sandersville Railroad Company Hancock County, Georgia **In re: Sandersville Railroad Company's Petition for Approval to Acquire Real Estate by Condemnation**	Docket No.: 45045

VERIFIED APPLICATION FOR LEAVE TO INTERVENE
OF VERNE KENNEDY HOLLIS

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. §§ 46-2-59 and 50-13-14 and Rule 515-2-1-.06 of the Georgia Public Service Commission (the "Commission"), Verne Kennedy Hollis ("Verne") respectfully requests that the Commission grant her Verified Application to Intervene in the above-captioned proceeding (the "Proceeding"). Verne owns an undivided 25% share of a parcel of land targeted for eventual acquisition by Sandersville Railroad Company in its Petition for Approval to Acquire Real Estate by Condemnation that is the subject of the Proceeding. Each of her siblings, who are also seeking to intervene, own the remainder of the undivided shares of this parcel. Verne has interests of the highest order—the preservation of her family property—and she thus fits the criteria for intervention set forth in Georgia statutes and this Commission's administrative provisions.

In support of this Application, Verne states as follows:

FACTS PERTAINING TO VERNE'S INTEREST IN THE PROCEEDING

1. On March 8, 2023, the Sandersville Railroad Company ("Sandersville Railroad") filed the Petition with the Commission.

2. The Petition sought approval pursuant to O.C.G.A. §§ 46-8-120 and 46-8-121 to acquire by condemnation land that is owned by Robert Donald Garrett Sr. and Sarah Veazey

Garrett (the "Garretts"). The Garretts' land is identified as Hancock County Tax Parcel Number 186 013, which corresponds to 1335 Shoals Road, Sparta, Georgia 31087 (the "Garrett Parent Tract"). Petition 4.

3. The Petition sought approval to condemn the Garrett Parent Tract to build an industrial spur (the "Hanson Spur") between the CSX line near Sparta, Georgia, and a large open-air mine called the Hanson Quarry. Petition 1.

4. In the Petition, Sandersville Railroad asserts that it will require 18 parcels of right of way for the Hanson Spur, including one parcel belonging to Verne and her three siblings, who are related to the Garretts (the "Garrett Siblings Tract"). Petition 3; Petition Exhibit "B" at 1; Petition Exhibit "C" at 2 ("Parcel 14: "Sally G. Wells, Verne Kennedy Hollis, Ellison Garrett and Donna Garrett").

5. Verne and her siblings, Sally G. Wells, Herus Ellison Garrett, and Donna Garrett share ownership in the Garrett Siblings Tract. Each sibling owns 25% of the property.

6. Verne and her siblings are Don Garrett, Sr.'s nieces and nephew. As discussed in the Garretts' application to intervene in the Proceeding, the Garretts' land has been in their family since just after the Civil War.

7. All of the siblings live in or near Sparta. None currently live on the Garrett Sibling Tract, but they use it frequently for family gatherings and recreation. The Garretts' ancestral home is located on the Garrett Siblings Tract.

8. The siblings recently deeded a small portion of the property to Verne's daughter, who built a home on the property. While Verne's daughter's property is not targeted for condemnation, the railroad track as currently mapped will run just a few hundred feet from her home.

9. Verne and her siblings plan to leave the Garrett Siblings Tract to their children as an inheritance, and they wish for the property to remain whole and intact.

10. Verne enjoys and makes use of the Garrett Siblings Tract, and the proposed condemnation will directly and negatively affect her enjoyment and use of the Garrett Siblings Tract. Verne also intends to use the Garrett Siblings Tract in the future in ways that will be directly and negatively affected by the proposed condemnation of the Garrett Siblings Tract.

11. The Sandersville Railroad served the Petition on the Garretts on March 10, 2023.

12. The Commission docket for the Proceeding is Docket #45045.

13. On March 24, 2023, the Commission appointed Nancy Gibson as the Hearing Officer to preside over the Proceeding pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 46-2-58.

14. On April 5, 2023, the Garretts filed an application to intervene in the Proceeding.

15. On May 2, 2023, the Garretts answered the Petition.

16. On May 2, 2023, Marvin Smith, Jr. and Patricia Smith, owners of Parcel 7 as identified in Exhibit C of the Petition, and William Blaine Smith and Helen Diane Smith, owners of Parcels 8, 10 and 11 as identified in Exhibit C of the Petition (together, "the Smiths") filed applications to intervene in the Proceeding.

17. On May 18, 2023, the Hearing Officer filed a Procedural and Scheduling Order and Notice of Hearing ("Scheduling Order"). The Scheduling Order set a hearing in the Proceeding for November 27–28, 2023.

18. On June 1, 2023, Sandersville Railroad notified the Commission, the Garretts, and the Smiths that legal notice of hearing would be published in the Fulton County Daily Report on June 2, 2023, and in the Atlanta Journal Constitution and The Sparta Ishmaelite on June 4, 2023.

19. According to the Scheduling Order and O.C.G.A. § 46-2-59(c), applications for intervention in the Proceeding are due 30 days from first date of publication of notice. Scheduling Order 1(a).

20. Thirty days from June 2, 2023 is July 2, 2023, which is a Sunday. Therefore, applications for intervention in the Proceeding are due July 3, 2023. *See* O.C.G.A. § 9-11-6(a) and § 1-3-1(d)(3).

GROUNDS FOR INTERVENTION

21. The Commission or the Hearing Officer should grant this Application for five reasons. First, Verne has a legal, property, or other interest of the highest order. Second, no other party can adequately protect Verne's interests. Third, her Application is timely. Fourth, Verne's proposed intervention presents identical issues of law and fact as those already raised by the Petition. Finally, because the resolution of the Proceeding will directly affect the ability of Verne to protect her interests in her property in the future, to deny Verne the right to participate fully in the Proceeding would violate her due process rights.

Verne Has Important Legal, Property, or Other Interests

22. Intervention before the Commission is governed by O.C.G.A. §§ 46-2-59 and 50-13-14, Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. 515-2-1-.06, and the Scheduling Order. Under the relevant portion of O.C.G.A. § 46-2-59, the Commission or a hearing officer shall only permit a person to intervene who "demonstrates a legal, property, or other interest in the proceeding." O.C.G.A. § 46-2-59(e)(2).

23. Because she owns 25% of the Garrett Siblings Tract, Verne has a legal and property interest in the Proceeding that is of historic and continuing importance, and, as such, she meets Georgia's standards for intervention in this Proceeding.

No Other Party Can Adequately Protect Verne's Interests

24. In determining whether to permit intervention, the hearing officer may consider "whether the person's interest is adequately represented by other parties and whether the intervention will unduly delay the Proceeding or prejudice the rights of other parties." O.C.G.A. § 46-2-59(e)(2). The Scheduling Order requires that applicants "identify other intervening Parties or intervening party applicants whose interests are similar to the applicant along with an explanation of why the identified intervening Parties or intervening Party applicant will not adequately represent the applicant's interest[.]" Scheduling Order 1(b).

25. No other parties can adequately represent Verne's interests in the Proceeding. To meet this standard, an intervenor need only show that his or her interests "may be" inadequately protected, a burden that is "minimal." *Trbovich v. United Mine Workers of Am.*, 404 U.S. 528, 538 n.10 (1972); *see also Sw. Ga. Prod. Credit Ass'n v. Wainwright*, 241 Ga. 355, 356, 245 S.E.2d 306, 307 (1978) (intervention was proper when intervenor had a claim adverse to the opposing party involving the subject matter of the pending suit).

26. Verne's status as sole owner of a unique portion of the Garrett Siblings Tract deserves vigorous legal protection. To be sure, other property owners whose property is targeted for condemnation by Sandersville Railroad, and who have applied or may apply to intervene in the Proceeding, have similar interests to Verne in that their property, too, will be taken against their will by Sandersville Railroad. However, that is where the similarity ends. Every piece of real property is unique. *See Cobb Cnty. Bd. of Tax Assessors v. Sibley*, 244 Ga. 404, 404, 260 S.E.2d 313, 315 (1979) (finding that the uniqueness of land affects its value). *See also Focus Ent. Int'l, Inc. v. Partridge Greene, Inc.*, 253 Ga. App. 121, 127, 558 S.E.2d 440, 446 (2001) (finding that "[l]and, under Georgia law, is deemed sufficiently unique that it is entitled to equitable remedies"

to protect interests in land). Because land is unique, physical and environmental impact to each parcel may vary parcel by parcel, and condemnation of adjacent parcels of land can result in varying diminution of value for different properties and their owners. *See Gilmore v. Sandersville R. Co.*, 149 F. Supp. 725, 727 (M.D. Ga. 1955) (finding that the diminution of value to adjacent parcels varied, where various plaintiff landowners challenged a railroad's attempt to condemn their land in order to build a spur track that would run six miles from an existing track to terminate at a kaolin plant).

27. Verne is the sole owner of a unique portion of the Garrett Siblings Tract. The railroad's impact on the Garrett Siblings Tract will be unique as compared to the Garrett Parent Tract, or the other properties targeted for condemnation by Sandersville Railroad. Furthermore, no other parties have an incentive to adequately protect Verne's interests. Because no other intervening party or applicant intervening party has incentive to protect Verne's interests as vigorously as Verne, Verne should be permitted to intervene and participate fully in the Proceeding.

28. Verne also has a claim adverse to Sandersville Railroad involving the subject matter of the pending Proceeding—namely, she wishes to fully protect her interests in the Garrett Siblings Tract and actively assert her rights under Georgia law in the Proceeding. She therefore meets this "minimal" burden for intervention.

This Application is Timely

29. O.C.G.A. § 46-2-59(c) provides in relevant part that "[a]ny other person desiring to intervene must file an application for leave to intervene within 30 days following the first published notice of the proceeding." The Scheduling Order provides that applications for

intervention in the Proceeding are due 30 days from the first date of publication of notice. Scheduling Order 1(a).

30. As noted above, Sandersville Railroad first published notice of this Proceeding on June 2, 2023, triggering a deadline of July 3, 2023, for applications to intervene.

31. Verne has filed her application for leave to intervene well before the deadline of July 3, 2023. As such, the Commission or Hearing Officer's grant of this timely Application will not "unduly delay the Proceeding or prejudice the rights of other parties." O.C.G.A. § 46-2-59(e)(2).

Verne Will Address the Central Issue in the Proceeding

32. The purpose of Verne's intervention warrants the grant of this Application. Verne desires to intervene in the Proceeding to protect her interests, including but not limited to protecting her rights to receive notice of any action in the Proceeding; present evidence, provide testimony, and cross-examine witnesses; submit briefs; participate in any Commission-ordered mediation, hearings, or other Proceeding; and be heard in oral argument.

33. Her interest in this Proceeding correlates with the sole issue in this case, namely, whether the Petition meets the standards for the use of eminent domain under Georgia law. As such, Verne presents questions of law and fact identical to those raised by the Petition and her participation will not introduce any issues unrelated to those already raised by the Petition.

Denying Verne's Intervention May Violate Due Process

34. Finally, to deny Verne full participation in the Proceeding may violate her due process rights. Limiting or conditioning the participation of individuals or entities whose property will be directly affected by Sandersville Railroad's proposed condemnations would create significant due process issues. *See Mathews v. Eldridge*, 424 U.S. 319, 333 (1976) ("The

fundamental requirement of due process is the opportunity to be heard 'at a meaningful time and in a meaningful manner.'" (quoting *Armstrong v. Manzo*, 380 U.S. 545, 552 (1965))); *see also United States v. James Daniel Good Real Prop.*, 510 U.S. 43, 48 (1993) ("[I]ndividuals must receive notice and an opportunity to be heard before the Government deprives them of property.")

35. According to Sandersville Railroad's own assertions, the Garrett Siblings Tract would be included in subsequent condemnation attempts by Sandersville Railroad. Therefore, Verne has significant property interests at issue in this proceeding, especially if there is any possibility that the Commission's factual findings or legal conclusions regarding Sandersville Railroad's petition to condemn the Garrett Parent Tract could have a preclusive effect on subsequent condemnation attempts by Sandersville Railroad. *See Bd. of Pub. Safety v. Jordan*, 252 Ga. App. 577, 584, 556 S.E.2d 837, 843 (2001) (recognizing "the preclusive effect of the factual findings entered by [a] hearing officer" that are ratified by the relevant agency); *see also Forsyth County v. Martin*, 279 Ga. 215, 217, 610 S.E.2d 512, 515–16 (2005) (holding Superior Court's affirmance of administrative law judge's fact determination that a county was an owner of a dam collaterally estopped the county from relitigating its ownership in subsequent suit by property owners to require county to assume ownership, repair, and maintenance of the dam).

36. That is, it is likely that important legal and factual issues that would arise in any proceeding by Sandersville Railroad to acquire Verne's property will be decided in the Proceeding. Verne should have a say in the resolution of those issues. In such circumstances, the Fourteenth Amendment demands a robust process guaranteed to minimize the threat of erroneous deprivation of these interests; excluding Verne from full participation in the Proceeding does not meet that standard.

Verne Intends to Provide Direct Testimony

37. The Scheduling Order provides that intervening party applications must "state the applicant's present intention to submit direct testimony and by whom and on what subject." Scheduling Order 1(b)(2). Verne intends to submit direct testimony on the subject of the unique features of the Garrett Siblings Tract, how she uses the Garrett Siblings Tract, and the potential impact to the Garrett Siblings Tract by Sandersville Railroad's condemnation.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Verne respectfully requests that the Commission grant her Verified Application for Leave to Intervene in the Proceeding as a party, with full rights of participation as provided by the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure and appropriate sections of the Georgia Code on all issues of law and fact to be developed during the Proceeding. Verne further respectfully requests that she be placed on the Commission's official service list to receive copies of all notices, pleadings, orders and other documents that are submitted or otherwise made available in the Proceeding. All such notices, pleadings, correspondences, orders and other documents should be served on Verne and her counsel as follows:

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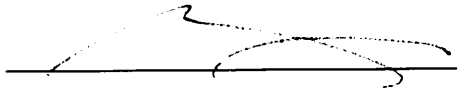
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DATED this 20th day of June, 2023.



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**Pro hac vice* applications pending

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GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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VERIFICATION OF APPLICATION FOR LEAVE TO INTERVENE

Grant E. McBride personally appeared before the undersigned Notary Public and stated under oath that he is an authorized representative of Verne Kennedy Hollis in this matter and the facts contained in the foregoing *Verified Application for Leave to Intervene* are true and correct to the best of his information, knowledge and belief.

This 20 day of June, 2023.

Grant E. McBride

Counsel for Intervenor
Verne Kennedy Hollis

KRISTIN YOUNG NOTARY PUBLIC SPALDING COUNTY, GEORGIA My Comm. Expires June 27, 2026

Sworn to and subscribed
before me this 20th day
of June, 2023.

Kristin Young
Notary Public
My Commission Expires: 6/27/26


KRISTIN YOUNG
NOTARY
My Comm. Expires
June 21 2026
PUBLIC
SPALDING COUNTY, GEORGIA

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this 20th day of June, 2023, a copy of the foregoing *Verified Application for Leave to Intervene* has been served via electronic mail and U.S. First-Class Mail on the following pursuant to GA. COMP. R. & REGS. 515-16-16-.02; 515-2-1-.04(4)(b), (3):

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DATED this 20th day of June, 2023.

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