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## St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce voices support for recall of coroner

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Erin Lowrey

The St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce issued a statement Tuesday voicing its support behind the recall effort of the coroner.

A recall petition was filed against Christopher Tape two weeks ago.

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This comes after court documents resurfaced from New Mexico accusing Tape of sexual abuse.

The chamber, which represents more than 1,000 St. Tammany businesses, issued the following statement encouraging community members to sign the petition:

*"As the leading voice of business in St. Tammany Parish, representing 1,100 area businesses and their 37,000 employees, St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce consistently stays informed about issues that affect the quality of life in the parish and its attractiveness to new and continuing businesses. The Chamber's Board of Directors, after careful consideration, recently voted to endorse and support the recall of St. Tammany Parish Coroner Christopher Tape and encourages members to support and sign the recall petition circulating throughout the parish.*

*"After taking office on March 25, 2024, following an election where he had no opponent, Dr. Tape decided to unilaterally discontinue the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program which provided a first-class response system to a delicate, traumatic experience claiming it was a 'business decision.' This action followed prior allegations calling his integrity into question. The issues have become widespread, caused many parish and state elected officials to call on Dr. Tape to resign, and resulted in local and national news media coverage.*

*"Our Chamber board considered the information and research provided, engaged in lengthy discussions and believes it is in the business community's best interest to support the coroner recall,' stated Chris Abadie, 2024 Chamber Board Chair. 'This coroner is responsible over both death investigations and the mental health of persons and, as such, should be held above reproach, especially in matters overseen by his office.'*

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*"We encourage our members to sign the recall petition," said Chamber President and CEO Lacey Osborne. "The website [RecallTape.com](https://www.RecallTape.com) is the best place to find locations throughout the parish to sign the petition." The website also provides updated information about the recall effort."*

Organizers have 180 days or six months to get the signatures needed to try and get Tape out of office.

The **petition** was filed by St. Tammany resident Jean Cefalu.

The organizers need over 37,000 signatures and if they get those signatures, a vote will be held and voters can decide if Tape stays or goes.

Pushback against Tape has started since court documents resurfaced from New Mexico, which revealed Tape faced six counts of child sex abuse in 2001.

The charges were dismissed because the judge ruled the state violated Tape's right to a speedy trial.

Tape gave a statement to WDSU about the recall petition when it was filed:

"I certainly respect the right of the people to do that, but I think if I'm given the opportunity to do the job I've been elected to do, the voters will be satisfied."

March 25, 2024, was Tape's first full day in office.

In Louisiana, a recall petition requires signatures from a certain percentage of registered voters within a voting area.

Those signatures must be handwritten and certified within 180 days before an official filing is submitted to the governor's office.

According to the secretary of state's office, the governor can choose to put forth an election proclamation within 15 days after they receive the certified petition from the **Registrar of Voters Office**, if the required number of qualified electors of the voting area signed the recall petition.

The recall would then be added to a ballot for residents to vote on.

State Sen. Patrick McMath says Cefalu and other leaders will file the petition after the groundwork is laid, but once it is filed, they have a short window to remove him from office.

"The folks that will be spearheading this thought it would be best to get their ducks in a row," McMath said. "Set up the team to that's going to be required to get over 36,000 signatures and not start the clock today because once you file that paperwork, you have six months."

McMath also said, "This decision has had an effect on sexual assault survivors and their ability to start the healing process and get justice."

This comes after **many St. Tammany elected officials expressed their concerns** over Tape's history of sexual abuse allegations.

According to court records in New Mexico, Tape, who was elected the St. Tammany Parish coroner in August of 2023 during qualifying, was accused more than 20 years ago of sexual abuse of a minor.

Court records show that the allegations came to light on May 16, 2001, in Bernalillo County.

Tape was accused of forcing himself on a girl who was under the age of 12.

He was indicted on six charges in August 2002, according to court records.

The case against Tape was dismissed in February 2003 after the court determined a delay of nine months in his trial was a violation of his right to a speedy trial.

The state admitted that the delay stemmed from an excessive caseload and limited resources to handle Tape's case.

The state appealed the dismissal of his case in August of 2003, but as of today, Tape has not been convicted of a sex crime against a minor.

**Tape refused to resign over the allegations and also announced in a statement that he'd be discontinuing the SANE program through the coroner's office that allows trained professionals to give exams and collect evidence in sexual assault cases.**

Since the allegations came to light, both the Slidell City Council and the St. Tammany Parish City Council passed resolutions urging for Tape to resign.

The parish president and Northshore Legislative Delegation released statements regarding their concerns over the allegations against Tape and voiced their support of a recall.

This is not the first time there has been concern regarding Tape and his position within the coroner's office.

Former St. Tammany Parish Coroner Charles Preston fired Tape before he took over the office **due to allegations of him violating the office's confidentiality policies.**

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