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Media Statement

(By: James Gulotta on behalf of Gayle Benson, Dennis Lauscha, Greg Bensel and the New Orleans Louisiana Saints, LLC)

Gayle Benson, Dennis Lauscha and Greg Bensel recently were contacted by members of the media about emails leaked to the press in violation of a court order. The emails were previously produced by the Saints in response to a subpoena from attorneys representing plaintiffs suing the Archdiocese of New Orleans for alleged abuse. The emails concern public relations assistance provided to the Archdiocese of New Orleans in 2018 in anticipation of press interest in the publication of a list of clergy who were credibly accused of abuse.

First and foremost, no member of the Saints organization condones or wants to cover up the abuse that occurred in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. That abuse occurred is a terrible fact. As a member of the Catholic faith, Mrs. Benson will continue to support the Church and the great things it does. Her support is unwavering, but she has no intention of donating funds to the Archdiocese to pay for settlements with abuse victims and she has not done so.

Critical press reports of clergy abuse prior to and during July of 2018 greatly concerned Archbishop Aymond, local civic leaders and members of Catholic laity. One of those leaders, U.S. District Judge Jay Zainey, suggested to his friend, Archbishop Aymond, that Greg Bensel (the longtime SVP of Communications for the Saints) may be able to assist with handling the large volume of media inquiries related to clergy abuse. Judge Zainey disclosed his suggestion in a February 2020 press interview. Mr. Bensel was also asked by other local civic leaders to assist the Archdiocese. He sought and received Mrs. Benson's approval to assist the Archdiocese. No compensation from the Archdiocese was expected or received in return for Mr. Bensel's assistance.

In August 2018, Archbishop Aymond sent a pastoral letter to the local Catholic community reporting on, among other things, the formation of a lay commission with expertise in investigation, law enforcement and other fields to conduct an independent review of clergy abuse. Part of the commission's charge became the plan to publish a list of credibly-accused clergy. No one affiliated with the Saints was a member of the commission. As the leaked emails show, in mid October 2018, Mr. Bensel contacted local media to begin arranging a press conference and individual interviews in connection with the expected release of the list.

February 1, 2025

In preparation for release of the list, Mr. Bensel's emphatic advice to the Archbishop was to be fully transparent with the media, and to do a sit-down interview with every media outlet that requested an interview.

Regarding the list of credibly-accused clergy published by the Archdiocese in November 2018, **no Saints employee had any responsibility for adding or removing any names from that list or any supplemental list.** Nor did any Saints employee offer any input, suggestions or opinions as to who should be included or omitted from any such lists. Any suggestion that any Saints employee had any role in removing anyone from the Archdiocese's published lists of credibly-accused clergy is categorically false.

A leaked email written by Mr. Bensel that was recently obtained by the press refers to a conversation that he was told had occurred between a member of the staff of the Archdiocese and former Orleans Parish District Attorney, Leon Cannizzaro, concerning the list. Mr. Bensel did not participate in the conversation with Mr. Cannizzaro. Mr. Bensel has no firsthand knowledge of what was said by anyone during the conversation or in any communication between the Archdiocese and the District Attorney's office. The leaked email refers to Mr. Bensel's understanding that the list would be updated by the Archdiocese.

It was also Mr. Bensel's understanding that one purpose the Archdiocese had in consulting with the DA's office was to determine whether disclosure of any member of the clergy under consideration for inclusion on the list would interfere with a criminal investigation. Neither Mr. Bensel nor any member of the Saints organization was involved in the determinations made by the Archdiocese.

On the date the original list was published, Archbishop Aymond also published an open letter to the congregants of the Catholic Church. In his open letter, he specifically stated that the list had been given to the Orleans Parish District Attorney and would be made available to other District Attorneys. Nothing Mr. Bensel was told in any conversation or communication he had with anyone connected with the Archdiocese is inconsistent with Archbishop Aymond's description in his open letter of the policies applied by the Archdiocese to compile the published list.

Nothing in the leaked emails contradicts prior public statements by the Saints or Mrs. Benson regarding the scope of Mr. Bensel's assistance to the Archdiocese. In a March 2019 letter to the editor, Mrs. Benson highlighted the Church's good works. Any suggestion by the press that her letter was misleading or somehow excused the misconduct of members of the clergy is baseless.

Specific to media questions posed to Mr. Lauscha, he acknowledges that he inquired of Mr. Bensel whether one particular clergyman rumored to have been accused of abuse was expected to be included on the list. It is Mr. Lauscha's understanding that the clergyman to whom he referred in his query to Mr. Bensel was included on the list or on a supplemental list. As previously stated, neither Mr. Lauscha nor Mr. Bensel had any involvement or input, nor any opinion, as to the composition of the list. Media inquiries also asked about a list of questions Mr. Lauscha gave to

February 1, 2025

Mr. Bensel that the Archbishop should be prepared to answer. The questions that Mr. Lauscha suggested were intended to encourage openness and transparency. For example, one of Mr. Lauscha's suggested questions was "Why has it taken so long for the church to [be] honest, transparent and open about this issue?".

As Mrs. Benson expressed in a February 2020 press release, she is repulsed by the actions of past clergy who engaged in abuse, and prays for the healing of both the abuse victims and the Church. Mrs. Benson hopes for a brighter future for both. She is also grateful for her position in this community. She is proud of her executive team and supports them. The entire organization remains dedicated to continuing to be a leader in assisting our community as it has been for many years. While the public relations assistance offered to the Archdiocese has come under scrutiny, Mrs. Benson and her team remain steadfast in bringing our community together and continuing to help the good people of our community.

It is unfortunate that the media has used the occasion of Super Bowl week to exploit the disclosure, in violation of court order, of leaked emails for the purpose of misconstruing a well-intended effort. The team and the entire city are committed to hosting the greatest Super Bowl week and game ever.