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Coalition to Protect New York [www.CoalitionToProtectNewYork.org](http://www.CoalitionToProtectNewYork.org)

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Three Local Residents Sent to Jail for Defending Their Homes and Families**

More than 150 people packed the Town of Reading (NY) Court on Wednesday, April 17 to witness what they believe is a shocking miscarriage of justice.

Three members of a group dubbed the “Seneca Lake 12” — massage therapist Melissa Chapman of Schuyler County, farm owner Michael Dineen of Seneca County, and Sandra Steingraber, PhD, author, biologist, and distinguished scholar at Ithaca College — were sentenced to jail terms for their resistance to the heavy industrialization of the peaceful rural region they call home.

“What has happened to civil society?” asked a stunned Helen Savich when she saw her hero Sandra Steingraber hauled off to jail.

On March 18, Steingraber and 10 fellow residents of the Seneca Lake region, in a peaceful act of civil disobedience, blockaded a gas compressor station site run by Missouri-based Inergy, LLP, on Seneca Lake. They did so to demonstrate their opposition to Inergy’s planned heavy industrialization of the Finger Lakes region, renowned for its natural beauty, vineyards, and tourism- and agriculture-based economy.

Inergy’s gas storage and transportation project in the Town of Reading, right on Seneca Lake, threatens the water supply for 100,000 people.

All 11 protesters, along with a legal liaison, were arrested and charged with trespassing.

On April 17, Judge Raymond Berry of the Town of Reading imposed a fine of \$375 for trespassing for Chipman, Dineen, and Steingraber, the three people appearing that evening. All three refused to pay (their statements are attached), and the judge ordered that each spend 15 days in jail.

“I think this is an unusually harsh sentence,” said Maura Stephens of the Coalition to Protect New York, “as it forces working people to give up income, lose time working on the land in this critical springtime, and sacrifice time with their families.”

Supporters of the defendants were shocked at the judgment, and concerned for the health and safety of their friends being sentenced to jail.

“Sandra was sobbing and hugging her family and us in that room off the hallway,” said Jan Quarles, wife of Michael Dineen. “I’ve never seen Sandra break down like that before, and I’ve known her for a very long time.”

Dr. Steingraber is respected worldwide for her scientific knowledge, eloquence, and commitment to everyone’s right to clean water, air, and secure food supply.

“If even someone of Sandra’s stature and fame can be thrown into jail because of her reasonable and deeply held convictions, can there be justice for any one of us?” asked Jack Ossont, a fellow Seneca Lake 12 protester who had appeared in court two weeks earlier with two fellow defendants. Ossont and others paid their imposed \$375 fine with the help of community supporters.

Steingraber, Dineen, and Chipman are in jail now, but fellow activists will be holding vigils each evening from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at their places of incarceration. The vigils will continue until they are released. Steingraber is a featured guest on an upcoming episode of PBS’s *Moyers & Company*; see a short video [here](#).