

Artist & Author Julian Raven Files Lawsuit Against New York State DEC Over Property Contamination Dispute

Lawsuit claims DEC wrongly classified Elmira art studio site, sparking artist's legal challenge to state authority.

ALBANY, NY, UNITED STATES, October 23, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- International artist and author Julian Raven has filed a lawsuit against the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC), alleging the agency actions are arbitrary and capricious, in its handling of contamination issues at his Elmira property.



Raven Artist Studio at 714 Baldwin St.

[The case, Raven v. NYS DEC \(Index No. 2025-1215\)](#), has been filed in the New York State Supreme Court, Chemung County, and challenges what Raven describes as the agency's misclassification of his property's contamination status and its recent attempts to escalate enforcement action under a September 5, 2025 "Order on Consent."

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"The mere presence of contaminants ... is not a sufficient basis" for a significant-threat finding."

Raven v NYS DEC #2025-1215

That order, Raven claims, authorizes the state to temporarily seize his property, dig up his building, seize his soil and conduct remediation at his property located at 714 Baldwin Street, potentially costing over \$600,000. Raven

purchased the long-abandoned industrial building in 2014, later converting it into his art studio.

Dispute Over Liability

The DEC has classified Raven as a Potentially Responsible Party (PRP) under state environmental law, linking him to pollution discovered beneath and around the property, that most likely is from a plume emanating from Diamond Cleaners, a contaminated and already remediated dry

cleaners site 300 feet up-gradient from his property. Raven disputes the "Significant threat" classification, stating that the contamination levels do not reach the threshold the DEC claims and originates from unknown sources with no threats to drinking water, neighbors or the environment.

He also argues that his efforts prior to the purchase to cooperate with the agency since 2014 — including requests for indemnification — have been ignored.

"The DEC's action amounts to environmental eminent domain based on a faulty conclusion," Raven said in a statement. "They have slow-walked a supposed 'significant threat' for 20 years and now want to seize my soil by force."

The artist, who is representing himself, says his lawsuit seeks judicial review of the DEC's determination and asks the court to correct what he calls a "fundamental misclassification" of the property's contamination level.

Named defendants include Governor Kathy Hochul, DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton, Project Attorney Dudley Loew, and Project Manager Kira Bruno. The state is represented by Assistant Attorney General Mike Danaher under New York Attorney General Letitia "Tish" James. The case has been assigned to Judge Christopher Baker in New York's Supreme Court in Elmira, New York.

The lawsuit raises questions about whether the DEC can seize soil based on what Raven describes as "an erroneous and unsupported contamination rating."

While the complaint focuses only on officer and agency administrative and statutory issues under NYS Article 78, Raven also claims that the DEC's conduct infringes upon his due process rights.

Connection to Smithsonian Litigation

Raven's legal battle in Elmira mirrors his ongoing high-profile [lawsuits against the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.](#), where he is challenging the institution's legal structure and the federal government's oversight of the Smithsonian Trust. That case, *Raven v. President Donald Trump*, Chief Justice John Roberts, Secretary Lonnie Bunch, the U.S. Congress, and the Smithsonian Institution ([25-cv-02332-TSC \(TNM\)](#)), [is ongoing in federal court](#).

Both lawsuits, according to Raven, stem from the same principle — holding public institutions accountable. He argues that bureaucratic systems too often drift away from transparency and their founding purposes.

"Whether it's a national museum or a state agency, the pattern is the same," Raven said. "Bureaucrats forget they exist to serve the public, not rule over them."

Raven, who describes himself as a beneficiary of the Smithsonian Trust and an advocate for public accountability, chronicled his earlier legal battle in his 2022 book, *Odious and Cerberus: An American Immigrant's Odyssey and His Free-Speech Legal War Against Smithsonian Corruption*.

Artist and Activist

Beyond the legal disputes, Raven views his litigation as an act of civic responsibility and creative expression. He describes his approach as “artistic litigation” — using the legal process to highlight issues of justice, integrity, and public stewardship.

“The courtroom has become my canvas,” Raven said, citing inspirations from the Apostle Paul’s appeal to Caesar and Martin Luther King Jr.’s use of peaceful protest and litigation to advance social change.

Raven argues that both of his cases — against the Smithsonian and the DEC — reveal a broader challenge facing American governance: the tendency of institutions to prioritize control over service and collaboration.

Public Context and Local Impact

The DEC has recently faced other public controversies, including the widely reported “P-Nut the Squirrel” seizure case, in which the agency seized a rescued animal that had become an internet sensation. That incident drew national media attention and online criticism, with many accusing the department of overreach.

Raven suggests the same bureaucratic rigidity that characterized that event is evident in his case. “They couldn’t see the public benefit and great PR in skillfully using the squirrel story to inspire conservation, animal rescue, education and informing about the law. In my case, they have refused my multiple invitations into crafting a desperately needed positive Elmira story of artistic neighborhood/city transformation, by a simple stroke of the DEC pen at no cost to the DEC! It makes me wonder if the NYS DEC has another agenda?” Raven quipped.

Raven’s lawsuit emphasizes that his vision for 714 Baldwin Street was not merely personal, but civic: to transform a blighted site into a hub of creativity and community engagement.

Upcoming Hearing

The Order to Show Cause hearing for *Raven v. NYS DEC* is scheduled for November 19, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. at the Supreme Court in the Hazlett Building, Elmira, New York. Raven has invited members of the public, media, fellow artists and local officials to attend.

Additional information about the case and related materials can be found at:

www.714BaldwinStreet.com
www.SmithsonInstitution.com
www.JulianRaven.com
www.ravenartgallery.store

About Julian Raven

Julian Raven is a British-born, Spain raised, American artist, author, and civic activist known for his large-scale impressionistic and abstract expressionist paintings, photography and his Smithsonian odyssey. His work often explores themes of faith, freedom, and the relationship between creativity and governance. Raven's legal advocacy and writings focus on transparency, integrity, institutional reform, and the role of the artist in civil society.

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