



Office *of the* Governor
JOHN BEL EDWARDS

CHALLENGES MET. PROGRESS DELIVERED.

Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, 2016–2023

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Introduction

Message from DOC Secretary Jimmy Le Blanc

Reducing crime and investing in the public safety are paramount to improving quality of life. The John Bel Edwards administration has made historic reforms and investments in Louisiana's criminal justice system. For the past eight years, the Edwards administration's positive changes and improvements have changed the state for the better for future generations.

When Governor Edwards took office in 2016, Louisiana was known as the incarceration capital of the World . In 2017, the state passed sweeping bipartisan criminal justice reforms that have resulted in a cumulative saving of \$152.6 million dollars. Through Justice Reinvestment, 70 percent of this money has been reinvested in programs and initiatives that reduce reoffending and support crime victims. This has already resulted in Louisiana dramatically reducing its prison population to historic lows. Because of these reductions, Louisiana is now second behind Mississippi in incarceration rates. There is more work to do, but these important bipartisan reforms have put us on a much better path.

Louisiana has also seen a reduction in caseloads for Probation and Parole officers, allowing agents to focus on individuals in the most need of community supervision. Successful community supervision is key to reducing crime and ultimately recidivism of those who are on probation or parole.

Over the past several years, the Department of Corrections worked to implement additional reforms focused on the use of segregated housing in its institutions. The reforms restrict the use of segregated housing and

length of time a person is in segregation. It requires ongoing status reviews and mandates privileges while in segregation. The Department also created a uniform disciplinary/sanctions matrix to ensure consistency of sanctions for rule violations across all state-run institutions, while all the time working on the mental health issues within its population.

At a time when government and the private sector face staffing challenges. Increased pay and aggressive recruitment campaigns supported by the Edwards administration have helped in recruiting and retaining correctional officers to staff Louisiana's prisons, and new officers to the Division of Probation and Parole. In addition, extended and improved training are ensuring these officers are well prepared to carry out the Department's mission of public safety and improving the inmates it incarcerates.

In September 2022, the Edwards administration broke ground on a state of the art women's facility to replace Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, which the historic 2016 Baton Rouge area flood destroyed. The new facility is designed to provide rehabilitative, educational, medical and mental health, and post-partum programming.

Reforms and initiatives put in place by the Edwards administration have established a strong foundation for continued improvements to the Louisiana Criminal Justice system and ultimately public safety.

Progress Delivered

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Criminal Justice Reforms - Justice Reinvestment

Six years ago, Governor Edwards and his administration set out on a bold course to reform Louisiana's criminal justice system. The goals were targeted: address consistent and alternative sentencing for non-violent and non-sex offenders in order to free up space in prisons for those who posed a more serious threat to public safety, strengthen community supervision, expand reentry services, and reinvest a substantial portion of the savings into services to reduce recidivism and support victims of crime. Until that time, the state was spending \$700 million each year on the corrections system and had high recidivism rates and the highest imprisonment rate in the nation, mainly due to sending people to prison for non-violent offenses at 1.5 to 3 times the rate of other Southern states. At that time, Louisiana was known as the incarceration capital of the world but public safety was not better because of it, and taxpayers were not getting a good return on their investment. Louisiana was lagging behind other southern states that had already made successful reforms.

In 2017, Governor Edwards signed into law the most comprehensive bipartisan criminal justice reform package, known as the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), in the state's history. Implementation of the JRI legislation has led to significant progress including a decline in the overall prison population and the number of those who require supervision, an increase in investments in victims' services and community partner organizations, an expansion of reentry centers and staff, the creation of specialty courts, and a decrease in the average Probation and Parole officer caseload. Prior to JRI, Louisiana's prison population was more than 35,000 and today that number has decreased to slightly more than 27,000- the overwhelming majority of whom are incarcerated for violent offenses. To date, savings from the JRI totals \$152.6 million. Of those savings, by law 70 percent (\$106.9 million) has been reinvested back into juvenile justice programs, victims' services, community-based programs, reentry state prison and local jail programs, and other initiatives designed to reduce recidivism. The remaining 30 percent goes back to the general fund.

Restrictive Housing

Louisiana has made tremendous improvements in restrictive housing practices for both incarcerated individuals and the state's prison staff. Restrictive housing is being in a cell for more than 22 hours a day. Reduction of the use of restrictive housing has been a focus of the Department of Corrections (DOC) since at least 2016. In 2018, the Department of Corrections piloted reforms to use of restrictive housing and closed Camp J at Louisiana State Penitentiary. In 2021, the Department implemented these reforms at all of its state-run prisons, drastically reducing the use of restrictive housing, and reduced the number of people in restrictive housing in the DOC's state prisons by more than 19-hundred. Through the reduction of restrictive housing the DOC has fostered a therapeutic environment for the incarcerated populations in these facilities, which in turn may reduce recidivism among those releasing back to the communities.

Reinvesting a substantial portion of the savings has allowed community organizations statewide such as The United Way of Southeast Louisiana, The Louisiana Parole Project, Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans and Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Louisiana to provide more services and fill in the gaps where needed to help those reentering society. Funding has been provided to community organizations in Bossier, Caddo, Calcasieu, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lafourche, Orleans, Ouachita, Rapides, St. Tammany, and Terrebonne, where approximately 58 percent of our prison population is coming from and returning.

As an example, The Louisiana Parole Project located in East Baton Rouge, Orleans, St. Tammany, Jefferson and Caddo parishes received Community Incentive Grants and expanded services offered through the Guided Community Reentry Program for High stakes/high needs juvenile lifers, 40-year lifers, and others who have been incarcerated 20 or more years granted release by the committee on Parole. Those services benefit formerly incarcerated individuals like Freddie Wilbert, whose story you'll read later

Challenges Met

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2016 Flood

In August 2016, floodwaters inundated the Baton Rouge region displacing thousands of people and causing billions of dollars in damages. During the flooding, Department of Public Safety and Correction employees did some amazing things. Staff safely and successfully evacuated two entire prisons. More than a thousand Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women inmates and approximately 600 Livingston Parish Prison inmates were moved to other institutions around the state. This was the first time an entire state prison had ever been evacuated in Louisiana. DOC officers, medical, mental health, and support staff followed these inmates and staffed the facilities which housed the evacuated inmates. In addition, Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP), Dixon Correctional Institute (DCI), Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC) and Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC) inmates created more than 25, 000 sandbags for the Capital Area Region. Inmates and staff sandbagged and placed tiger dams around LCIW and EHCC.

Inmates and staff also provided additional support:

- Sandbagged and placed tiger dams around LCIW and EHCC
- DCI, LSP, and RCC staff and offenders prepared Jetson Correctional Center for Youth to be used by evacuated LCIW offenders
- DCI staff and offenders provided cleaning services at Baton Rouge's three largest shelters including Celtic Studios, the Baton Rouge River Center, and the F.G. Clark Activity Center
- Probation and Parole Officers provided security for Baton Rouge's three largest shelters
- Probation and Parole Officers checked Southeast Louisiana shelters for sex offenders
- DCI's Pen Pals sheltered more than 130 displaced pets

Hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Ida

Prior to the landfall of hurricanes Laura, Delta and Ida, Department of Public Safety and Corrections staff safely evacuated 7,000 prisoners from local facilities in coastal Louisiana parishes. The Department filled 160,000 sandbags and 2,300 super sack sandbags for Grand Isle's recovery and restoration during the Hurricane Ida response in 2021.

The Department also filled more than 40,000 sandbags during the 2020 and 2021 hurricane seasons for residents living in communities near Louisiana's state-run prisons. Probation and Parole officers provided security at several of Louisiana's hurricane shelters.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The Department of Corrections (DOC) faced unique challenges in its response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The state's prisons followed CDC and State Health Department guidance in masking, social distancing and quarantining and isolation. During this uncertain time, Department response proved to be tremendous. Staff put others before themselves in the interest of supporting others and the agency's mission of public service.

In an effort to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19, in March 2020 the Department of Corrections suspended visitation. So as to minimize the hardship of separation from their families and to keep inmates and their families connected, the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) and Securus provided inmates at Louisiana's state-run prisons two free 10 minute calls per week. The Department also provided inmates with two free email stamps per week, and offered video calling for video visitation at Louisiana's state-run prisons at a reduced rate.

Through the rollout of the Department of Corrections' (DOC) vaccination and testing, the Department successfully limited and managed the COVID-19 exposure of its prison population. The DOC offered the COVID-19 vaccination to every inmate in Louisiana's state-run prison. The inmate COVID-19 vaccination rate exceeded 83 percent among the prisoners at Louisiana's state-run prisons.

To help local partners, the DOC repurposed Camp J at Louisiana State Penitentiary for isolation of local level inmates in an effort to prevent the spread of the virus in Louisiana's parish jails. During the pandemic response, Camp J isolated and quarantined 368 local level offenders from 33 parish facilities.

The Department created a webpage to keep family, the public and media informed about what was being done at Louisiana's prisons to protect the incarcerated population. The webpage also provided updates on the number of inmate and staff infections at each facility. DOC also created informational videos for the inmate population and the public.

Leaving Louisiana Better Than We Found It

04

Stories of Our Success

05

Louisiana is in a position to build on the progress made during the Edwards administration. Historic reforms and reinvestment have resulted in lower incarceration rates and lower Probation & Parole caseloads, which in turn have meant more education and rehabilitation for the justice-involved individuals incarcerated and/or supervised by the Department of Corrections. Additional resources are resulting in lower recidivism rates, which translate in less victims, less crime, and cost savings for Louisiana's taxpayers.

Like other corrections departments across the country, the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) is faced with the challenge of recruiting and retaining correctional officers, nurses, mental health staff and Probation and Parole Officers. With the support of the Edwards administration, the DOC has been able to implement pay adjustments to address the need to fill vacancies in each of these positions. This included Special Entrance Rate (SER) adjustments to address the Departments most critical vacancy and turnover areas. One of the most critical needs is that of correctional officers. The DOC now has a competitive \$40,250 annual salary for newly

hired correctional cadets, which is attracting candidates who are applying to work in Louisiana's state-run prisons. In addition to the increased pay, the Department has launched an aggressive recruitment campaign and routinely hosts job fairs to attract qualified staff to continue the DOC's mission to foster rehabilitative opportunities for imprisoned people that supports their successful transition into the community.

One of the most anticipated technological upgrades is the Department's new offender management system. Corrections Information Program and Records System, better known as CIPRS, is slated to replace the old and outdated CAJUN as well as the Lotus Notes databases among other legacy systems. The State's Office of Technology Services and the Department of Public Safety and Corrections are working jointly on producing the new platform. CIPRS promises to make day-to-day operations more efficient and effective with significant improvements to automation of processes. The system is being launched in phases. When completed, the interoperable system will link the courts, clerks of court, sheriffs, and jails, as well automates time computation.

Rebuild of Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women

On September 1, 2022, Governor Edwards, Department of Public Safety & Corrections Secretary Jimmy Le Blanc and other state and local leaders and dignitaries broke ground on Louisiana's new state-of-the-art Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, a 938-bed facility that is strategically designed to enhance the Department's focus on providing rehabilitative, educational, medical and mental health, and post-partum programming.

This new facility will provide more space for reentry and vocational programs than were available at LCIW before it flooded. It will allow for the expansion of much more programming to benefit those who are incarcerated at the new prison, and allow the DOC to fulfil its mission of rehabilitation and preparation in LCIW.

This will replace the women's prison that flooded in 2016. Right now, construction crews are busy building this modern facility that promises to better prepare Louisiana's incarcerated female population for successful transition back to their communities. Completion of the new Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women is expected in early 2025.

Freddie Wilbert was serving a life sentence as a multiple offender for crimes committed in his youth and became parole-eligible as a result of Louisiana's 2017 criminal justice reforms.

Equipped with a master Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification, a power generation technology certification, and a host of self-development and recovery programs, Freddie left prison focused, introspective and mature, a man whose goal is to heal his relationship with his daughters and be the father they need him to be.

As a Louisiana Parole Project client, Freddie credits the organization as being a difference-maker for being granted parole. "I don't believe I would be here, have this opportunity for a second chance if Parole Project wouldn't have supported me," he said. "I did not have a solid place to go, particularly one that offered the kind of support, services, housing and programming that Parole Project does."

But it was his work and preparation for life beyond prison that has allowed him to flourish since his release. The master ASE certification and his work as an automotive technology tutor while incarcerated, led to an employment opportunity. Soon after completing the intensive reintegration phase of the Parole Project's programming, Freddie began a job at a car dealership as an automotive technician. Working all the extra hours he could at the dealership, Freddie was able to purchase a car and, with it, a feeling of accomplishment. He continues to learn, currently taking online classes to earn a General Motors automotive certification that will allow him to advance. All of it, he admits, has improved his confidence and self-image. "I appreciate every day now," he said. "Especially the simple things, the small things, something I never did before."

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*Slowly but surely ...
I've been healing.
I'm still trying to
get back into the
workforce.”*

06

BY THE NUMBERS

- Since the Implementation of Reform Legislation:
 - The state's prison population has reduced approximately 32 percent, allowing the Department of Corrections to focus on those that need the most attention. The most recent data shows Louisiana's incarceration rate at 561 per 100,000 per capita, down from its peak incarceration rate of 870 per 100,000 per capita.
 - As of June 2023, the state's prison population is at approximately 27,800, down from a high of 40,583 in May of 2012.
 - The state has experienced a 35 percent reduction in its community supervision population. At its peak in October 2017, a Probation and Parole Officer supervised 142 cases. Today, the average caseload per officer is approximately 92, which means officers have the capacity to spend extra time with those that need it the most.
 - As of June 2023, the total Probation and Parole population is approximately 46,500.
 - The state has realized a total accumulated savings of approximately \$152.6 million attributed to Justice Reinvestment, of which \$106.9 million has been reinvested back into:
 - Juvenile justice diversion programs, \$18.2 million
 - Crime Victims' services, \$17.7 million
 - Community-based programs, \$26.5 million
 - and other initiatives designed to reduce recidivism in the Department of Corrections, \$44.2 million
- For those releasing from incarceration, Louisiana has experienced a 17.8 percent reduction of five-year recidivism from the highest level of 49 percent to 40.3 percent.
- The current five-year recidivism rate for individuals who have completed their Probation and Parole supervision is at 14.1 percent.
- Since the 2017 Criminal Justice legislation, 92 juvenile lifers have been released onto parole.
- From Fiscal Year 2020 to present, through Justice Reinvestment, 982 individuals on community supervision at risk of becoming homeless have been afforded much-needed Emergency Transitional Housing.
- Since Fiscal Year 16/17, Department of Corrections inmates earned thousands of various educational certifications, diplomas and degrees:
 - 3,077 HiSET (high school equivalency) diplomas
 - 6,232 industry-based credentials
 - 10,674 college degrees
- The Louisiana Department of Corrections Career and Technical Education Programs offer training in 135 separate, stackable Industry-Based Credentials (IBCs) across 44 training/craft areas for high demand, high wage fields.
- Since January 1, 2017, the Department of Corrections has enrolled 21,496 in Medicaid.





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