

Department of Public Safety & Corrections

INSIDE OUT

Keeping Loved Ones Informed



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"We as a Department want to thank you for your continued support of your loved one in prison. **Your love and support is making a difference in their lives!**"

–Secretary Jimmy Le Blanc

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COVID-19 Updates

Make sure to watch **doc.la.gov** to see the Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check for updates on **vaccinations, visitation,** and any other changes.

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"People have to make a decision that prioritizing **diversity, equity, and inclusion** throughout the Department is an important component of wellbeing, and I'm so grateful that Secretary Le Blanc has a top down vision and has entrusted me with this new role."

–Tanisha Matthews, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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A Message from the Secretary



The Covid-19 global pandemic brought with it a unique set of challenges that thrust Corrections agencies across the country into uncharted territory. In March of 2020, the Department of Public Safety & Corrections took aggressive measures to protect the health and wellbeing of inmates and staff and to proactively reduce the risk of COVID-19. This comprehensive response deployed unprecedented and sweeping operational measures which included the suspension of all in-person visitation and programming in state prisons, strenuous restrictions on transfers into state prisons, and the imposition of Reverse Isolation housing units as a prevention measure to protect at-risk inmates.

I remain inspired by the strength and resilience on display in every corner of our Department. From our front line correctional staff who attend to our population 24-hours a day, to our health care professionals on the front lines testing for the virus and providing vaccinations, all while continuing to provide the excellent health care that patients require under normal circumstances. From our Probation and Parole agents who stepped up to provide support at the prisons and offsite hospital trips, to our administrative staff and leadership team located at Headquarters and across the state who keep this Department running, to the inmates in our facilities who have shown incredible patience, resilience, and empathy despite having not been able to see loved ones in-person for nearly a year. Taken together, this extraordinary mobilization has and will continue to reduce risk and to save lives.

We as a Department want to thank you for your continued support of your loved one in prison. Your love and support is making a difference in their lives!

Secretary Jimmy Le Blanc

COVID-19 Update

Due to the rise in COVID-19 cases statewide and out of an abundance of caution, all visitation in state prison facilities has been suspended for a three week period. Secretary LeBlanc and staff will re-evaluate this suspension in mid-August. The Department will continue to provide two free 10 minute phone calls and two JPay stamps per week to every inmate to help people maintain connections with loved ones while in-person visitation is suspended. Make sure to watch **doc.la.gov** to see the Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check for updates on vaccinations, visitation, and any other changes.



An incarcerated individual at Louisiana State Penitentiary receives the COVID-19 vaccine in April 2021.

Collective Effort, Collective Engagement

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center Implements STRIVE Program

Raymond Laborde Correctional Center (RLCC) has implemented a new incentive program for imprisoned people who display high moral standards, good conduct, and the desire for rehabilitation through education, programming, and self-help courses made available at the facility. The 377 incarcerated individuals currently enrolled in the STRIVE (**S**uccess **T**hrough **R**ehabilitation **I**ntegrity **V**irtue and **E**ducation) program were rewarded with STRIVE caps and distinguished identification cards to display as results of their efforts and success.



Any imprisoned individual at RLCC who meets the following qualifications may apply to join the STRIVE program:

- They must be assigned to a permanent DPS&C facility for a minimum of one year, RLCC six months.
- They must have no Class B violation reports for at least one year and no minor Class A reports for six months.
- They must demonstrate a positive attitude and exemplary behavior and show good faith efforts.
- If assigned to restrictive housing at any point, they must be out of these housing statuses for at least six months.
- They must have a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or High School Diploma, be currently enrolled in educational programming, or on a waiting list for programming.
- They must be off non-contact visitation status for one year.
- They must be involved in programming or on a waiting list for program acceptance (if eligible).
- Individuals with a current or past conviction for a sex offense or who have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder must be enrolled, have completed, or on a waiting list for programming during current incarceration.

"It's helped me to reevaluate and reassess my own level of progress. It's helped me point out my strengths and weaknesses and given me the resources to deal with them," said Jirrico McKee, a currently imprisoned person. "It's encouraging. It's energizing. I'd compare it to working out with a group versus working out alone. It's like a fraternity. It's definitely a collective effort; it's collective engagement."

*RLCC's STRIVE is a unique honors program that is not affiliated with the STRIVE organization and programs founded in East Harlem. It receives no funding and uses existing resources at RLCC to reward and promote positive role models in the incarcerated community.

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RLCC STRIVE Continued

Along with the STRIVE cap and identification card, members of the STRIVE program receive the following privileges, among others:

- Canteen spending limit of \$150 per week, two visits per week
- Two regular four-hour visits (depending on space availability) and one four-hour picnic visit per month
- The same visitor three times per month and 12 visitors on list
- 24/7 access to microwave
- Access to TV in TV Room from 10:30 pm to 12:00 am on nights before work days, 24 hours a day before non-work days
- Access to telephones at all available times except Sunday 10:30 pm to Monday 12:00 am.
- Access to tier lobby until 12:00 am for reading and writing after lobby TVs are turned off on nights before work days
- Extra two hours in gym/library on Fridays, Saturdays, and evenings preceding non-work days
- Hobby-shop privileges extended (based on availability)
- Attendance to program-specific scheduled events
- Organized sports teams made of program members only
- Quarterly activity day (based on approved proposal submitted by the Offender Activity Committee)
- Shower availability any time after the noon count clears until 12:00 am on nights before work days
- Special meal/banquet once a year

“Since the program began, I’ve seen renewed interest from staff and inmates in programs. I think it shows that people want to be a positive force in their environment, even if it is in prison,” McKee said. “It’s not just an acronym or a program name; it’s a blueprint for success. We have to learn how to succeed, how to transition, and the STRIVE program can help with that.”

Helping People Get Hired Before Release

DPS&C Launches New Workforce Portal

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections has launched the Louisiana Reentry Workforce Job Portal, which allows currently imprisoned individuals to connect with potential employers. This can help reduce the fear associated with applying for jobs, only to be turned away because of a criminal history. Employers who sign up for the Portal are already aware of candidates' criminal past and are open to **Second Chance hiring**.

The Louisiana Reentry Workforce Job Portal is the first of its kind and is a secure and confidential platform created for the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections by Louisiana software company ATLO. Candidates have the ability to list any degrees, certifications, and/or completed programs, and employers can filter candidates based on which qualifications they are looking for. Employers represent a variety of industries and are looking for qualified and motivated candidates. A candidate can even participate in a phone interview and potentially be **hired before their release**.

"As we prepare imprisoned individuals for reentry to society through training opportunities that result in marketable skills, it is imperative that we complete the circle by having potential employment opportunities awaiting when they release from prison," said Secretary Jimmy Le Blanc. "Transitioning back to the community is a challenge. This portal gives our population a fighting chance of success in the workforce by connecting releasing individuals with employers, and vice versa."

Those who are part of new pre-release programming, instituted after April 2021, at state facilities and regional reentry centers are eligible to enroll. There are no eligibility restrictions in terms of offense. However, employers may filter their search to exclude those charged with violent or sex offenses. An individual may sign up for the Portal by reaching out to reentry staff at their facility or at the regional reentry center.

For more information on the Louisiana Reentry Workforce Job Portal, visit **doc.la.gov/returnforgood**.

Reentry Job Fair

Virtual Job Fair for Incarcerated Individuals

In partnership with Louisiana Workforce Commission and Urban League of Louisiana, the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections kicked off the first virtual job fair accessible to currently incarcerated individuals at five facilities. 60 individuals from Rayburn Correctional Center, Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, Plaquemines Jail, West Baton Rouge Jail, and St. Tammany Jail participated. This experience had mixed success due to technology hurdles, but DPS&C looks forward to using the platform more in the future to be responsive to current trends in employment, including increased use of virtual job fairs.



A Message of Hope, Restoration, and Transformation from Healing Place Church

The Transformative Power of Faith-Based Programming at LCIW

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections works to provide many educational and faith-based opportunities for imprisoned individuals. One such opportunity offered at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) is a bible study led by Healing Place Church (HPC).

HPC Ministry Coordinator Ann Morrow, leads these eight-week bible studies, which follow a curriculum that mirrors the focus of the church's Sunday teachings. "We want them to feel that we're coming under the heading of Healing Place Church," Morrow explains, "Pastor Mike and Pastor Rachel [Haman], this is what they're teaching, and we want to bring that to you."

"One thing that has been really impactful is that it's not just about teaching or the small groups," Morrow says, "When we get there, we'll just spend a little one-on-one time talking to them, letting them talk." She says the women often share prayer requests with the volunteers.

The group of eight to ten volunteers also strives to make holidays like Christmas and Easter special for the individuals imprisoned at LCIW. They organized a Christmas skit, where the incarcerated women both wrote the script and portrayed the characters. This pre-COVID event included a short sermon from Pastor Mike, and the volunteers even handed out gifts. **"It was a day of celebration,"** says Morrow.

The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges, including limitations on how many volunteers could enter a prison at once, but the group was determined to continue their important ministry. Morrow says, "We just feel a mandate by God that says, 'I was in prison, and you came to visit me.'"

"We take in there with us the message of hope, restoration, and transformation," Morrow says. She explains that the volunteers feel a significant impact, "because they see such a change. God has a plan for them as well as us." Morrow wants people to realize the positive effects of educational and faith-based programs available to incarcerated individuals in prisons. "They'll be able to reenter society and have a life they had dreamed of but never did have the ability because of their environment and various circumstances in their life."

HPC's ministry doesn't stop once an individual is released from prison. They have also led programming at Louisiana Parole Project, and some individuals even find support by attending church events after release. On July 11, 2021, HPC will begin offering weekly Sunday services at LCIW-Jetson, which will include live preaching as well as occasional videos. "God redeems no matter how deep the sin is," Morrow concludes.



2019 LCIW Christmas Pageant actors



2019 LCIW Christmas Pageant guests

Celebrating Success at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women

Graduates Excel Despite Pandemic

On April 27, 2021, Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) celebrated its first graduation since April 2019. Included among those recognized were 39 GED/HiSET recipients, 29 graduates from Ashland University with AA or BA degrees, 40 students participating in Tulane University, six individuals who completed Adult Basic Education, and 19 individuals who completed Literacy.

Despite classes being closed for four months due to COVID-19 and the JCCY Education Building being utilized as the COVID-19 quarantine unit, the graduation also included 31 Baton Rouge Community College graduates in Horticulture and Welding, five graduates of the LCIW Furniture Restoration class, two licensed instructors of the LCIW Cosmetology school, nine individuals who completed the Entrepreneurship Class offered by Wolf Creek Business Growth Institute, 90 individuals who completed the full IC3 certifications in Living Online, two individuals who completed PYTHON Computer Coding Certification, and 71 ServSafe certifications. Additionally, there were 71 construction-based certifications including 57 NCCER Core certifications, 40 OSHA certifications, and 14 certifications in crew leadership, cabinet making, and cabinet installation.



Secretary Le Blanc speaks to the April 27 LCIW graduates

Author and Speaker, Lisa Harper, Visits Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women

On May 27, 2021, Lisa Harper, theological writer and speaker, spoke at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW). Harper has published twelve books and regularly speaks at nondenominational events and churches. At LCIW, Harper shared a message of hope and perseverance through trials based on her journey with Missy, her adopted daughter from Haiti who was born with HIV.



Lisa Harper stands with her daughter, Missy, as she speaks to the women at LCIW.

Standing Together, Valuing Our Differences

Tanisha Matthews is Named Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Secretary Le Blanc recently created a new position within the Office of the Secretary to facilitate the ongoing Department-wide efforts to ensure diversity, inclusion, and overall staff wellness. He named Tanisha Matthews the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Matthews is uniquely qualified for the position after starting her career in corrections as a cadet at Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC), then moving to Human Resources (HR), where she worked for four years at EHCC and one year at Dixon Correctional Institute (DCI). She then moved to an HR position at DPS&C Headquarters. She was appointed as the HR Director in 2010 and served in that capacity for eleven years. Matthews describes the potential impact of the new DEI position, saying, "People have to make a decision that prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Department is an important component of wellbeing, and I'm so grateful that Secretary

Le Blanc has a top down vision and has entrusted me with this new role. He has modeled professionalism and inclusion throughout his career and tenure as Secretary, and this new role is an extension of his longstanding vision for the Department."

The first step for Matthews is helping to clearly define the terms, "diversity, equity, and inclusion." She explains, "Diversity is about the mixture we have of people from **different backgrounds**. It includes the things we usually think about like race, nationality, and gender but also some that we don't, like age, veteran status, physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and parental status. Diversity looks at the numbers and the percentage of individuals we have from different backgrounds."

"Equity is about ensuring **fairness** and that all individuals, employees, and incarcerated people, are given equal access to opportunities. For staff, that can include the things we generally think about like recruitment and hiring but also how work assignments are given out, how leave usage is approved, hiring, how we utilize pay mechanisms and advancement opportunities. For the incarcerated population, that can include how housing and work assignments are determined, ensuring equal access to education and programs, and even contact with loved ones through phone calls and visitation."

"Inclusion is the piece I'm most excited about because it's about the **culture and work environment**. I once heard that 'diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance,' and that really sums it up. Inclusion is ensuring everyone feels welcomed and included. Inclusive environments ensure that the backgrounds and perspectives of others are respected on a daily basis and people from different backgrounds are given opportunities to contribute their ideas and concerns."

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Standing Together Continued

While this position will consider many practices involving DPS&C employees, it's always with the ultimate goal positively of impacting the prison population. **"It's how you do life.** It's not just something you think of in one circumstance. If I value people, that includes the incarcerated population. We want staff who value everyone for what they bring to the table." She continues, "As Secretary Le Blanc often says, 'We are all better than the worst thing we've done.' The people in our custody and under our supervision are someone's son, daughter, sister, brother...and we are rooting for their success. When we effectively communicate and show that we want them to be successful, the likelihood of them being successful increases greatly."

"The reality is that the incarcerated population is the most impacted by the Department's hiring practices and the morale of our employees," Matthews says. "The prison population is our largest stakeholder. They live and work at the prison. It is their home. Staff who feel valued and who understand the concepts of treating each individual with respect will in turn do so with coworkers and the incarcerated individuals that they supervise. The ripple effect is quite large and why DEI can play a critical role in the work to ensure that all employees and people in prison are treated with dignity and respect, despite their differences."

Matthews has several objectives when it comes to seeing diversity, equity, and inclusion being actively practiced. "Training of staff is going to be critically important. The DEI Division will spend time at every institution first speaking with and training leaders. We really want to make it both a learning experience and a conversation. I will tour every facility and speak with staff and incarcerated individuals."

Matthews is most excited about the numerous possibilities for positive impact this position will create. "Learning from one another and using different perspectives and ideas to reach a common goal means everyone wins, everyone feels included."

Noteworthy Legislation from the 2021 Legislative Session

1. HB 32/Act 5 (Representative Larry Selders)

This bill allows inmates who earn a bachelor's and/ or master's degree while in prison to earn an additional 90 days of CTRP credit toward his or her projected good time parole supervision (GTPS) date.

2. HB 77/Act 61 (Representative Joe Marino)

This bill gives the court an increase of discretion regarding the suspension of sentences in felony cases. With this discretion, an individual charged with his or her subsequent conviction of a noncapital felony may instead be ordered to a court-ordered program in lieu of serving time in a prison or jail. This bill is effective August 1, 2021.

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Noteworthy Legislation Continued**3. HB 84/Act 121 (Representative Denise Marcelle)**

This bill changes the law regarding juror qualifications. Previous law restricted a person with a felony conviction from participating on a jury. This bill removes that blanket restriction and allows a person with a felony conviction to serve on a jury so long as the person is not incarcerated under an order of imprisonment, or has been on probation or parole within the last five years prior to the jury service.

4. HB 92/Act 257 (Representative Joe Marino)

This bill applies to individuals who have been wrongfully convicted. It increases the amount of compensation paid to these individuals beginning on July 1, 2022, to a rate of \$40,000 per year incarcerated, not to exceed a maximum total amount of \$400,000 and dispersed in an annual payment of \$40,000.

5. HB 145/Act 122 (Representative Marcus Bryant)

This bill makes changes to the provisions La. R.S. 15:574.A.2 which allows a person who has a sentence of thirty years or more, with or without parole, shall be parole eligible after serving 20 years and reaching the age of 45. This bill removes the restriction on armed robbery convictions and also clarifies that the restriction on violent and sex offenses applies to those offenses committed on or after August 1, 2014.

This bill gives parole eligibility after 15 years to a person serving a life sentence under the habitual offender statute, when the instant offense and all predicate offenses are non-violent and the instant offense was committed prior to November 1, 2017. La. R.S. 15.574.A(6)a.

6. HB 248/Act 125 (Representative Ted James)

This bill sets the monthly supervision fee to one dollar for persons placed on unsupervised probation by the court and persons who are on inactive parole status.

7. HB 271/Act 304 (Representative Denise Marcelle)

This bill authorizes DPS&C to create a Transitional Residential Pilot Program for female inmates, as the appropriate funds and resources are available. The purpose of this program is to aid female inmates in successfully reintegrating into the community once their time has been served. To be eligible for consideration for this program a female inmate (1) must be willing, (2) does not have a conviction of a sex offense, (3) is within two years of her projected release date, and (4) has not committed any major (Schedule B) disciplinary offenses in the two years prior to her entering the program.

8. HB 678/Act 453 (Representative Royce Duplessis)

This bill creates a Louisiana work opportunity tax credit for businesses that hire participants in the work release programs. Thus, the potential impact of this bill is an increase in Louisiana businesses hiring offenders in a transitional work release program; allowing greater opportunity for employment and successful reentry into the community. This bill is effective upon the Governor's signature as of June 23, 2021.

9. SB 186/Act 104 (Senator Gary Smith)

This bill authorizes a person convicted of an offense to seek post-conviction relief from the court on the grounds that he or she is factually innocent if the claim is filed on or before December 31, 2022, and if the person was convicted after a trial completed to verdict. The person must present new, reliable, and noncumulative evidence that would otherwise be admissible that would otherwise be admissible at trial and that was not known at or prior to trial. Specifies criteria for evidence.

The "Wildest Show in the South" is Back!

The Angola Rodeo Will Take Place Every Sunday in October

The Angola Prison Rodeo is back each Sunday in October offering the best in prison rodeo excitement! Warden Tim Hooper invites the public to view the wildest rodeo show in the South. Watch as Angola inmate cowboys compete in heart-stopping events like – Convict Poker, Wild Cow Milking, Bull Riding, and the world famous Guts-n-Glory. The gates open at 9 a.m. for fans to enjoy hobbycrafts and festivities, and the "Wildest Show in the South" begins at 2 p.m. This year's rodeo events are October 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, and 31st.



Tickets are \$20.00, and all seats are reserved.

ONLY Rodeo Tickets will be sold. NO separate Arts and Crafts Tickets will be available.

Rodeo fans are encouraged to come early to hear outstanding inmate bands, feast on a wide array of the South's best food, and shop the unique and affordable prisoner-made arts and crafts, including jewelry, leather craft, paintings, woodwork, lawn and garden furniture, and toys. Little rodeo fans will also enjoy special attractions just for them, including pony rides, carnival games, an antique carousel, and lots more!

In order to participate in the rodeo, inmates are required to have been vaccinated for COVID-19. The Department encourages rodeo fans who plan to attend to be vaccinated and health conscious.

Tickets can be purchased in advance online at **www.angolarodeo.com**, or by calling (225) 655-2030 or (225) 655-2607, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., Monday-Friday. Rodeo proceeds assist with the funding of cutting edge reentry programs which work to create fewer crime victims upon release.

Event information is subject to change based on CDC guidance regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Helpful Resources

LA Informational Handbook for Friends and Families of People in Prison



The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, with the help of many organizations, creates handbooks to offer advice on navigating the difficulties associated with having a friend or family member who is incarcerated. You can find them here:

doc.la.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/informational-handbooks/

You can follow the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections on YouTube to see helpful information regarding the imprisonment of a loved one, updates from Secretary Le Blanc, success stories of formerly incarcerated individuals, and much more!

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCUoUyiJooZTCn9x3cjdQw>



The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections Social Media



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Follow us for important updates!

To find more resources that could be beneficial to previously incarcerated individuals or friends and family members of currently incarcerated individuals, you can visit:

doc.la.gov

lareentryguide.com

reentryprograms.com/in/louisiana

reentryessentials.org