



Louisiana's Prosecutors  
- Innovative Programs -

National Prosecutors' Consortium



May 2019

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# Acknowledgements

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# The Evolving Role of the Prosecutor

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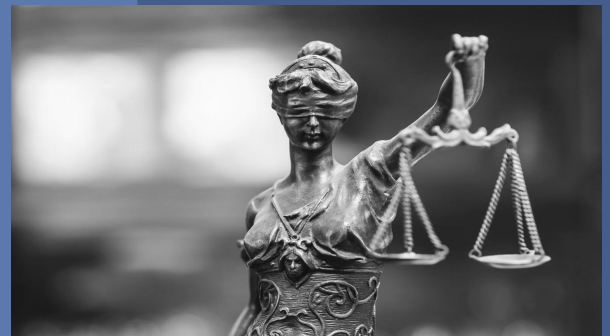
Over the last forty years, there has been a dramatic transformation and expansion of prosecutors' mission, to not only vigorously prosecute criminal cases, but also to engage in crime prevention, problem solving and community partnerships. Prosecutors have a core mission to protect the community and ensure justice when enforcing the law. Traditionally, a prosecutor's role was a limited and relatively passive one - to evaluate and prosecute arrests made by the police<sup>1</sup>. That role has expanded and evolved significantly. The shift is driven by the need for more complex solutions that not only seek positive outcomes for victims, but also strive for long-term solutions for preventing crime and assisting those who are entangled in the criminal justice system.

Prosecutors are uniquely situated to be effective in carrying out these new initiatives. They play a pivotal role in the criminal justice system, making decisions and exercising discretion about whether to prosecute, whom to prosecute, and how to prosecute. Also, as leaders in law enforcement, prosecutors can work with the police and other partners to improve community relationships and to build trust in the criminal justice system.

## The National Prosecutors' Consortium

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The National Prosecutors' Consortium (NPC) project is designed to collect information on innovative programs employed by prosecutor offices, to assist prosecutors in developing and deploying new programs, and to expand their research capabilities. The main



areas of focus are the prevention of violent crime, community engagement and encouraging victim/witness cooperation.

Many of the nation's prosecutors relish the opportunities presented by their expanded roles in the criminal justice system and have adopted innovative programs. However, the nature of their new initiatives is impacted by the size and resources of the organization. A large office with plentiful resources can implement multiple forward-thinking initiatives that impact a large segment of their population. Conversely, a smaller jurisdiction may only have the capacity to develop a smaller, yet still meaningful initiative.

Innovative programs described in this paper are newly developed initiatives undertaken by an office in keeping with its unique resources and the needs of its community. Ideas for new programs are freely shared amongst prosecutors and can nevertheless be innovative when they are introduced, implemented and customized to suit the needs of a particular office. For instance, a program that would be considered innovative in a smaller office, may be more common-place in a larger office. We seek to highlight those offices that are embracing their new role by working within their capacity to bring effective and proactive programs to their communities.

As part of the NPC project, a prosecutor survey was administered during 2019 at the county level across the United States on a state-by-state basis. The survey captures baseline information about prosecutor offices and collects information about the various evolving and non-traditional aspects of a prosecutor's office, such as alternatives to incarceration, preventing violent crime, community outreach, victim/witness support and treatment programs.

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1. Catherine M. Coles, *Evolving Strategies in 20<sup>th</sup>- Century American Prosecution*, in *THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE AMERICAN PROSECUTOR*, 182-187 (John L. Worrall & M. Elaine Nugent-Borakov, eds., 2008).

## Overview of Louisiana Prosecutor Programs

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Louisiana prosecutor offices range in size and in the types of communities that they serve. Some serve in large bustling cities, like New Orleans, and others work in suburban districts or rural areas. The available resources and staff vary greatly between the offices, as does the needs of their communities.

To their great credit, every prosecutor in Louisiana participated in the NPC survey. The survey demonstrates that Louisiana prosecutors participate in a wide variety of programs and initiatives. These programs include treatment courts, alternatives to sentencing, education programs, victim assistance and community outreach. <sup>2</sup>

The survey found that 86% of Louisiana’s prosecutors engage in problem solving courts or other programs that offer alternatives to incarceration. Every office offered victim assistance, and many had restitution programs (86%), witness assistance programs (67%), victim services even when there is no arrest (55%) and Community Affairs Units (55%). Interestingly, 31% of Louisiana’s prosecutors had a Conviction Review Program. Community programs that prosecutors either run or participate in are also common. Louisiana prosecutors are involved with truancy programs (81%), co-located child abuse programs (67%), youth education programs (62%) and community engagement (62%). They also have violence reduction programs (50%), co-located domestic violence programs (50%), adult education programs (40%). Some even sponsor sports programs (26%), neighborhood cleanup (26%) and re-entry programs (21%).

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2. *National Prosecutors’ Consortium, Survey Highlights: Louisiana*, Solomon, Uchida, et al., (May 2019). The survey report is available from the Louisiana District Attorney’s Association.

## Innovative Programs - Examples

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To demonstrate the variety of innovative programs initiated by prosecutors, three offices are highlighted: East Baton Rouge Parish, an urban parish with significant crime, Calcasieu Parish, a mid-sized parish on the southwest side of the state, and Red River Parish in the north and the fourth least populous parish in Louisiana.

The Baton Rouge program is a collaboration between the prosecutor’s office and private business aimed at reducing violent crime by focusing programming on young adults. In the medium-sized office in Calcasieu Parish, the prosecutor’s program identifies at-risk youth who are leaders among their peers to participate in various mentoring programs. The Red River District Attorney’s Office, with one full-time and three part-time prosecutors, developed a collaboration with law enforcement to teach fifth and sixth grades about the criminal justice system and has created diversion and rehabilitation programs for eligible defendants.

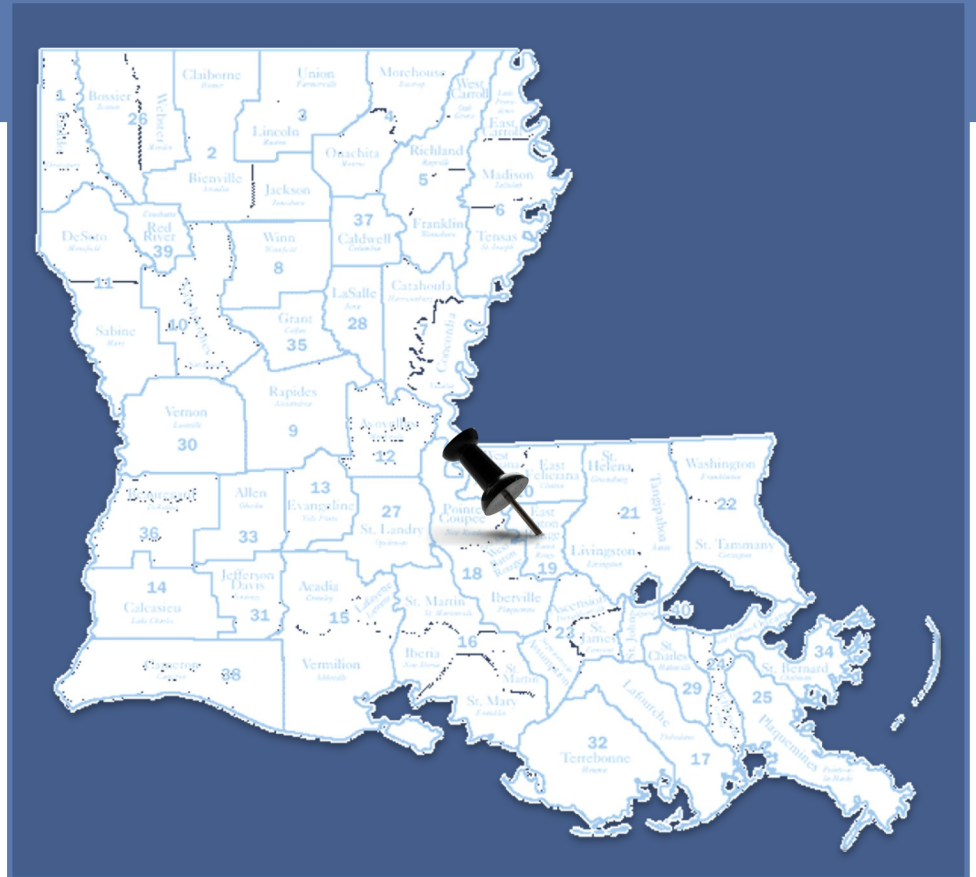
# East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office – 19th Judicial Parish

Population: 450,000

District Attorney Staff: 54 prosecutors

## TRUCE

Spearheaded by D. A. Hillar Moore, the TRUCE program was established in October of 2017 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with the express purpose of reducing violence in Baton Rouge. The mission of TRUCE is to identify and support the youth of the East Baton Rouge community who are at risk by providing them and their communities continued outreach and resources. The community-based organization is calling for a “TRUCE” between feuding groups. The program is privately funded by local businesses.



The Executive Director of TRUCE, Aishala Burgess, is a prosecutor in the District Attorney's office who has worked closely with the East Baton Rouge communities most at risk for violence. She has described the program this way: “We found that showing our young people love, showing them compassion, showing them that we're here to help them has gone a long way with reducing violence.” TRUCE is intended to be a warm and inviting program, giving families hope by giving them opportunities.



Research has shown that too much of the violence in Baton Rouge is driven by meaningless disputes among youth. TRUCE focuses on youth and young adults between the ages of fourteen (14) to twenty-four (24); the data has proven these specific age groups are responsible for the majority of the violence throughout Baton Rouge.

The TRUCE model uses a focused deterrence approach as a prevention strategy. Key elements of the TRUCE model include engaging community and faith-based leaders to provide a message for youth to stop violent activity and a law enforcement strategy that includes conducting group audits and call-ins of youth identified as being prone to commit or be a victim of violence.

Through community outreach events, TRUCE educates the public about its purpose and seeks to improve the community's perception of law enforcement.

The District Attorney's office works closely with juvenile court partners to identify youth who may benefit from the program. The TRUCE case manager creates individualized plans based on the needs of the specific client. TRUCE offers clients and their families social service referrals, provides transportation to appointments and job interviews. The East Baton Rouge District Attorney's office believes they can improve the quality of life in Baton Rouge one young adult at a time.



Aishala Burgess announcing the Truce Program. Also present, District Attorney Hillar Moore, business leaders, law enforcement officials and Mayor Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge (not in photo).



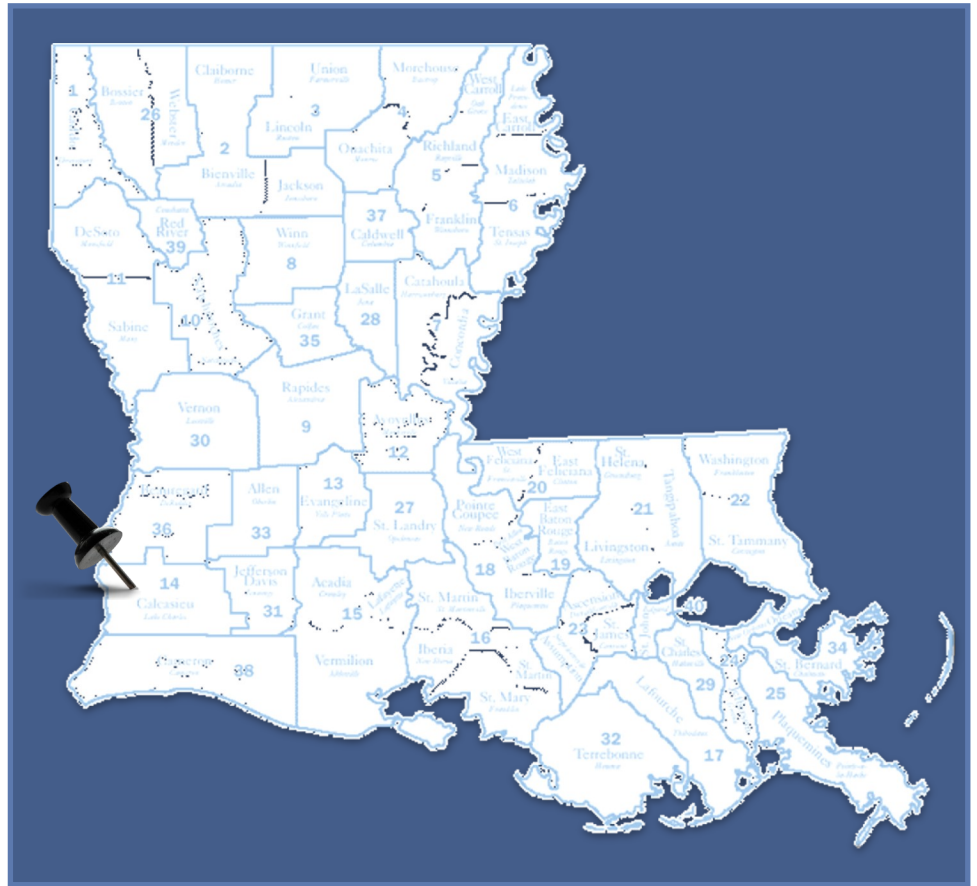
# Calcasieu Parish District Attorney's Office- 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

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**Population: 220,000**  
**District Attorney's Staff:**  
**29 prosecutors**

## Positive Change Initiative/Impact Agency

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In 2017, D. A. John DeRosier noticed a concerning uptick in juvenile violence and crime in the 14th Judicial District, specifically crimes involving young, black males. While there were measures in place to address a juvenile's action once he committed a crime, D.A. DeRosier noticed that his community was lacking a program that positively invested in the lives of at-risk youth by mentorship, positive leadership and provision of opportunities to the youth based on their strengths as a leader. This is how the Positive Change Initiative was created.

The program is funded through several stakeholders in the Parish; the Calcasieu Parish District Attorney, Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office, Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, Calcasieu Parish School Board and the City of Lake Charles. The Initiative, also known as The Impact Agency, began with approximately 50 students, or "agents", actively involved in the program. These young men were not just chosen because they were considered at-risk, they were chosen for their leadership ability, whether positive or negative, and their influence capability. They were hand-picked by their school principal, teacher, counselor or even their church Pastor. Thus, a gang leader, as well as a choir leader, could be picked for the program. The students chosen are referred to as "Agents".

The Agents meet on Sunday nights for two hours at the DA's office to study and learn about

successful leaders like Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and others. Successful minority men who grew up in the same neighborhoods as the Agents also give presentations and help to mentor the students.

The Agents recently spent a day at the Legislature, met Governor John Bel Edwards and learned about the processes of government.

Additionally, the program has developed a debate team. Agents have participated in three local debates, open to the public, one of which was moderated by Fox News Ted Williams. At the invitation of the Louisiana Supreme Court, the Agents spent a day touring the Louisiana Supreme Court and had lunch with six of the seven Justices of the Court. After a question and answer session, they observed two cases that were presented to the Court.

The students also spend time volunteering for community events and giving back to the community. Recently, the Agents helped serve honorees and guests at the Black Business Honors awards ceremony. At Christmas time, these young men spent time with residents in nursing homes by visiting and playing bingo.

The Impact Agency has up to seventy-five members and the hope is to open the program up to female students in the near future.

For more information about the program and the Calcasieu District Attorney's Office visit: [www.calcasieuda.com](http://www.calcasieuda.com) or see videos of the program on Facebook at The Impact Agency.



Governor Jon Bel Edwards with the Agents

# Red River Parish District

## Attorney's Office – 39<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

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**Population: 8,500**

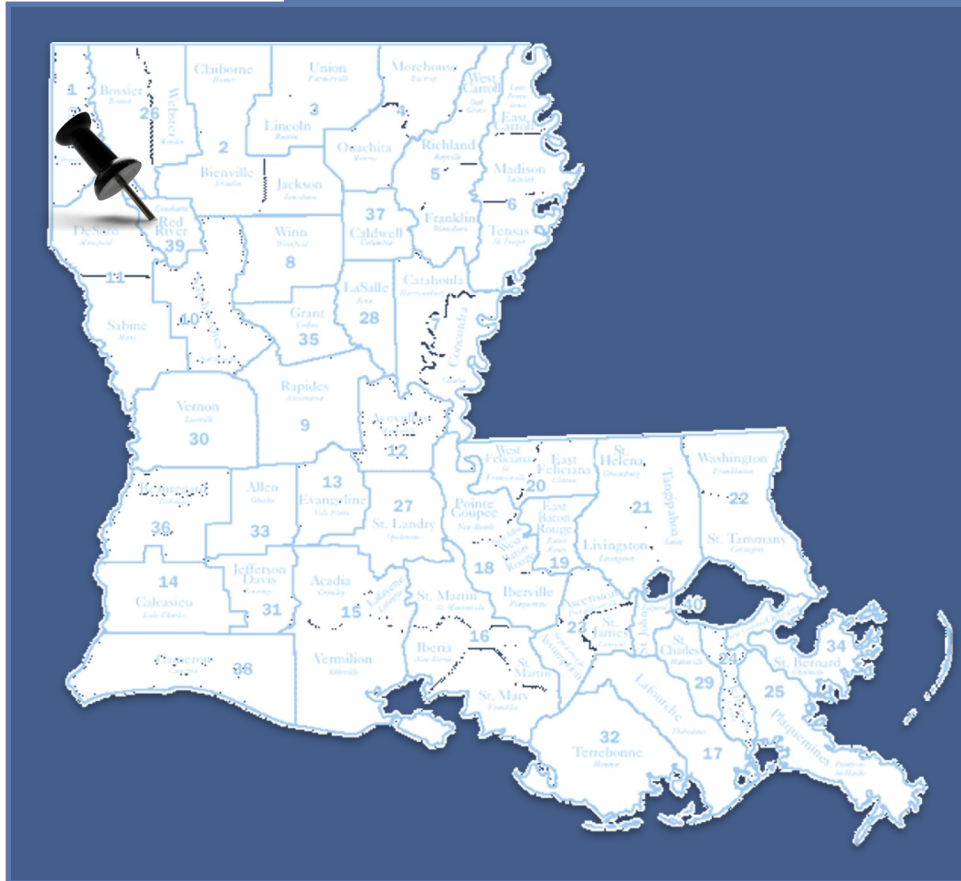
**District Attorney Staff:  
1 full-time prosecutor and 3  
part-time prosecutors**

## Project L.E.A.D.

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District Attorney Julie C. Jones created a new program in the Red River Parish school system called Project L.E.A.D. L.E.A.D stands for Legal Enrichment and Decision- making. This program encourages attorneys, law enforcement and other professional staff to take time out of their busy schedules to volunteer one hour a week to teach fifth and sixth-graders about the criminal justice system. Through Project LEAD, the office strives to better prepare students to make better choices so instead of being in court as defendants, they come to court as jurors, witnesses, law enforcement officers, lawyers and judges.

The children work with various law enforcement agencies in our parish, as well community leaders and elected officials, to better understand the various parts of the criminal justice system and how they inter-connect. The class lasts eleven weeks. The introductory class is taught by the District Attorney and includes an overview of the criminal justice system from detainment to sentencing and how it differs for the juvenile offender. Subsequent classes cover a host of topics which are taught by the District Attorney,





assistant district attorneys, law enforcement officers and/or counselors. The topics include classes on drunk driving, consequences of drinking, boating safety, internet safety, ATV safety, unauthorized use of movables, family and dating violence, bullying, truancy, and gun safety.

The program culminates with the students taking a field trip to the courthouse. Students tour the courthouse and meet with local elected officials including the judge, sheriff, warden, district attorney, clerk of court, tax assessor, police jury administrator, town mayor and registrar of voters. The students tour the parish jail's booking room, holding cells, library and kitchen. They also meet with two Red River Parish trustees who tell the students their stories and answer questions. After lunch, the students participate in mock trials in the courtroom where they role-play each facet of a trial, from judge, prosecution and defense to the witnesses and jury.



District Attorney Julie Jones with L.E.A.D. class

# Diversion and Rehabilitation Services

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In order to improve public safety and quality of life for residents of Red River Parish, D. A. Jones developed programs to match offenders and victims with appropriate services. In many cases the criminal driver is determined to be substances addiction, anger issues, mental health concerns, parenting deficiencies and often times a combination of several or all. For those offenders who are deserving of a second chance, the office attempts to match those offenders with the appropriate treatment programming in an effort to reach a long-term sustainable solution. This often saves careers, families and the community from the inevitable effects of criminal behavior. D.A. Jones says “in a rural setting we know our people, we are often able to discern between a one-time mistake and entrenched criminal behavior. Whenever we can prevent someone from re-offending, allowing them to be contributors to society and providers for their families – we all win.” There are still consequences for those who are deserving of that second chance. Defendants are required to comply with the onerous rules and regulations of the programming that they attend, while continuing to appear in court when scheduled. Successful completion of the programming – which can last from 30 days to 1 year - can result in dismissal of charges or a reduction in the severity of the offense. Failure to complete the program at any point in the process will result in the re-institution of the criminal charges against the defendant.

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