

Focus on *Access to Justice*

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Support Successful Prisoner Reentry: New laws in effect to reduce hurdles incarcerated people face

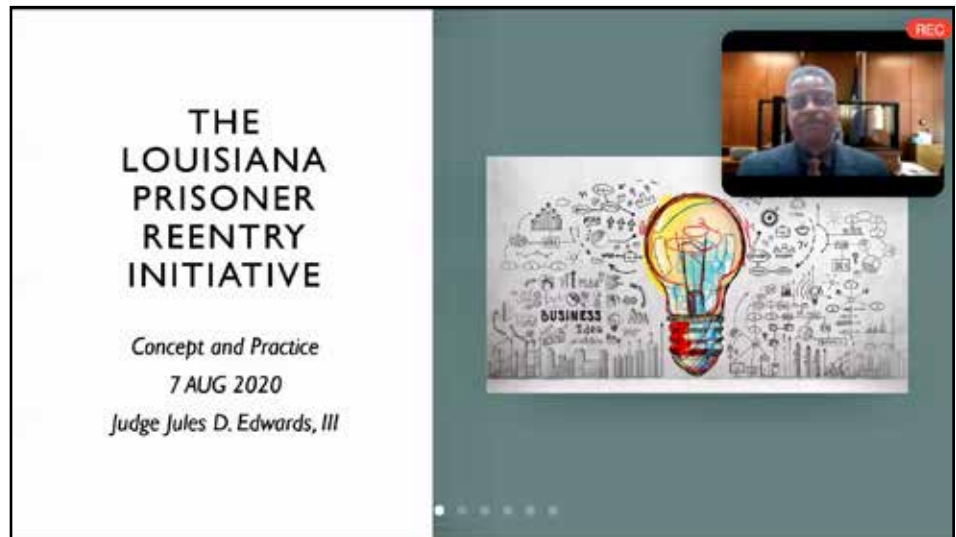
New laws passed during the 2020 legislative session will help remove hurdles people face after incarceration. On Aug. 7, the Louisiana Access to Justice Commission's Building Bridges Committee, which brings together civil and criminal legal aid providers to address reentry legal needs, helped educate attorneys on the new laws by offering a CLE titled "Supporting Successful Prisoner Reentry." The CLE brought together speakers from the court, the Legislature, the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections and nonprofit organizations to share knowledge about the new laws and how attorneys can get involved in these efforts.

Over the past few years, Louisiana has worked to address the state's high incarceration and recidivism rates. In 2017, the Louisiana Legislature passed sweeping reforms under the Justice Reinvestment Package to reduce prison populations in the state and invest in programs and policies proven to reduce recidivism — ultimately leading to crime prevention and safer communities. This year, the state continued to make changes and enact new laws to increase success in reentry for people currently or formerly incarcerated.

Judge Jules D. Edwards III with the 15th Judicial District Court presented an overview of the Louisiana Prisoner Reentry Initiative (LA-PRI), the framework for developing services to successfully reintegrate into the community, promote public safety and advocate for reinvestment.

Natalie R. LaBorde, executive counsel for the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C), presented an overview of where Louisiana is three years after most of the reforms have gone into effect, including the following highlights:

- ▶ decrease in prison population from peak of 40,583 to 28,500;
- ▶ accumulated savings of \$247 million from prison population reduction;



- ▶ first-year reinvestment of \$12.2 million; and

- ▶ average caseload per probation and parole officer reduced from 149 to 123.

Louisiana State Rep. Royce I. Duplessis (District 93), LaBorde, Ebonee R. Norris with The Norris Law Group and Vanessa A. Spinazola with the Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana (JAC) discussed legislative updates including:

- ▶ New law La. R.S. 15:714 provides a process to request letters of incarceration used to prove time served, which can affect attachments for failure to appear, insurance lapse, tax liability, and several other matters or payments owed during the incarceration period.

- ▶ Amendments to La. R.S. 15:574.2(D) (1) and R.S. 15:574.7(E) provide an opportunity for parolees who have met their parole conditions for a certain number of years to apply to be placed on "inactive status" through the parole board. This status reduces fees and parolee reporting requirements, thereby reducing barriers to community reintegration.

- ▶ Child Support Amendment Package passed in 2017 went into effect August 2020 to suspend child support obligations

for those who will be or are incarcerated for 180 or more consecutive days unless one of the written exceptions apply. The intent of the law is to encourage payment of child support obligations by ensuring the obligation amounts correlate to the obligor's actual income/assets.

- ▶ 2020 Expungement Package allowing for two article 893 set asides, removing work requirements and proof of consecutive years of work from art. 978 (E), changing expungement eligibility, and removing waiting periods between expungements.

- ▶ La. R.S. 15:865 amended to prohibit the use of solitary confinement for pregnant persons or eight weeks post medical release following a pregnancy or caring for a child in penal or correctional institutions, minus a couple of exceptions. Studies show people released from solitary confinement reoffend at a higher rate and show solitary confinement has irreversible effects on a person's mental health.

The CLE ended with Adrienne K. Wheeler with Louisiana Appleseed and Sarah Whittington with JAC highlighting

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ways in which attorneys can use this knowledge to increase a person's chances for success upon release from incarceration. Pro bono assistance is critical to addressing the overwhelming need for legal assistance in Louisiana, particularly in light of the amount of unmet legal needs and statistics shared during the CLE — one legal aid attorney for approximately 11,250 Louisianians who are potentially income eligible for free legal representation.

The CLE reached capacity at 100 attendees representing the private bar, district attorney offices, public defender offices, legislative offices, judiciary, Department of Corrections, legal aid organizations and advocates from across the state working to remove barriers to reentry for people currently and formerly incarcerated.

Those interested in more information on volunteering can contact Louisiana State Bar Association Access to Justice Training and Projects Counsel Amy E. Duncan, email amy.duncan@lsba.org, to connect with a legal aid or pro bono provider anywhere in the state.

A recording of the CLE is available on the LSBA ATJ webpage, www.lsba.org/atj, under "News." 📺

Lawyers and Libraries Project needs attorney volunteers for virtual presentations

For the seventh year in a row, attorneys throughout Louisiana will volunteer their time and talent to participate in the week-long series of events for "Lawyers and Libraries," coinciding with National Celebrate Pro Bono Week, an annual week of service established by the American Bar Association to highlight the need for pro bono participation and thank those who give their time year-round.

Because of concerns with the coronavirus pandemic, "Lawyers and Libraries" events will take place Oct. 26-31 via phone and webinar, rather than in libraries as usual.



Consisting of educational seminars and brief, one-on-one consultations, Lawyers in Libraries events have brought legal assistance to more than 3,000 Louisianians in public libraries and reached patrons in every parish. Last year, the event boasted a total of 102 attorney volunteers participating in 139 events at 78 library branches across the state.

This year, attorney volunteers will provide brief consultations over the phone, and several webinars slated for

broadcast statewide will address some of the most pressing legal issues facing the public today — successions, employment and housing law. Library partners across the state are promoting the events widely to their patrons on their websites and social media. Event organizers hope that the online format will allow patrons to participate who may not have been able to make it to the library before — expanding access to justice while keeping people safe.

Though the pandemic poses new problems for the legal profession, pro bono attorneys have stepped up to demonstrate that they are more than ready to meet the challenge. Their generous volunteerism is ever more critical as millions of people suddenly face legal emergencies as a result of COVID-19.

To find out more about how you can join in helping to address this overwhelming need, visit <https://www.lsba.org/ProBono/ProBonoVolunteering.aspx>. To sign up for a Lawyers and Libraries phone consultation slot, visit <https://lil.ivolunteer.com/2020>. 📺



LAWYERS *and* IN LIBRARIES

October 26-31, 2020

For the past 6 years, the Louisiana State Bar Association and the Louisiana Library Association have hosted "Lawyers in Libraries" events during National Celebrate Pro Bono Week. This year, we hope you will join "Lawyers AND Libraries" to provide virtual access to individuals who may be in even more need of legal direction as a result of the current health crisis. We need volunteers who will conduct educational conversations on relevant legal topics or who will virtually answer questions for participants across Louisiana.

**{ Make a difference and ensure justice:
volunteer virtually! }**

To participate in a virtual **Lawyers ~~in~~ AND Libraries** event, sign up at <https://lil.ivolunteer.com/2020>