



# The Louisiana Supreme Court NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## STATE TASK FORCE RELEASES PLAN TO SHED LOUISIANA'S #1 IMPRISONMENT RANKING

Recommendations would protect public safety, save \$305 million over next decade

**March 16, 2017—Baton Rouge, LA** – The Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force today handed Governor Edwards and legislative leaders a comprehensive plan for safely reducing the state’s highest-in-the-nation imprisonment rate. Based on a year-long examination of sentencing and corrections trends and research, the bipartisan Task Force came to consensus on strategic reforms designed to get more public safety for each taxpayer dollar spent. If adopted into law, the recommendations would reduce the state’s prison population by 13 percent over the next decade, reduce the number of people supervised in the community by 16 percent, and save taxpayers \$305 million.

“Louisiana is not only the incarceration capital of the country, we are the incarceration capital of the world,” said Governor John Bel Edwards. “For too long this has been a stain on our reputation and a drain on our communities. It’s not a reflection of who we are and what we stand for. We now have a roadmap that will allow us to keep our streets safe while shrinking our bloated prisons. It is now time for us to act.”

The Task Force found that taxpayers were not getting a good public safety return on the two-thirds of a billion dollars that the state spends each year on the correction system. Among the key findings:

- One in three people return to prison within three years of release.
- Louisiana sends people to prison for drug, property, and other nonviolent offenses at twice the rate of South Carolina and three times the rate of Florida, even with nearly identical crime rates.
- Among those sentenced directly to prison rather than probation, the top 10 crimes were all nonviolent, the most common by far being drug possession.
- Over half of the people sent to prison in 2015 had failed on probation or parole by violating supervision conditions or engaging in new criminal activity.

“Louisiana is tough on crime, and we’re going to keep it that way,” said Senate President John Alario. “But part of being tough is realizing that we can’t just throw money at problems. We have an obligation to taxpayers to spend their money in a way that makes them safe.”

The expert panel also examined state budget decisions, and reported that spending on prisons dwarfed investments in effective prison alternatives, programs that reduce recidivism and services that support crime victims.

“A lot of our low-level drug and property crime is driven by addiction,” said House Speaker Taylor Barras. “We can save millions and also have less crime by focusing prison beds on those who pose a more serious public safety threat and making smart investments in probation and drug treatment for nonviolent crimes.”

The Task Force recommendations are designed to:

- Ensure consistency in sentencing and release practices.
- Focus prison beds on those who pose a serious threat to public safety.
- Strengthen community supervision.
- Clear away barriers to successful reentry into the community and the workforce.
- And reinvest a substantial portion of the savings into evidence-backed alternatives to prison, programs that reduce recidivism, and services to support victims of crime.

“There’s no question that this package of reforms will help us save money and reduce reoffending,” said Department of Corrections Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc. “Reinvesting some of those savings into programs that reduce recidivism and support crime victims will be crucial to getting the best results for communities across the state.”

The Task Force conducted an extensive review of corrections data trends and research on what works to reduce recidivism. Members held public meetings, town halls, and roundtable discussions with crime survivors. They formed three subcommittees that examined sentencing and corrections practices from other states focusing on sentencing, release practices, community corrections, and financial policies.

“It was a great honor to serve on this Task Force,” said Chief Justice Bernette Johnson. “This report is the product of months of study and deliberation and our final recommendations set Louisiana on a path toward more safety and greater justice.”

Throughout the process, the Task Force received information and guidance from a broad range of stakeholders across the state, including judges, court administrators, corrections practitioners, law enforcement officials, behavioral health experts, service providers, formerly and currently incarcerated individuals and their families, justice reform advocates, business leaders, and faith leaders.

The members of the Task Force are:

Secretary James LeBlanc (Chair)	Louisiana Department of Corrections
Sheriff Mike Cazes	West Baton Rouge
Senator Daniel Claitor	Louisiana State Senate
Flozell Daniels	Foundation for Louisiana
Public Defender James Dixon	Louisiana Public Defender Board
District Attorney Bo Duhe	16 <sup>th</sup> Judicial District
Chief Justice Bernette Johnson	Louisiana Supreme Court
Hon. Lori Landry	16 <sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court
Representative Terry Landry	Louisiana House of Representatives
Representative Walt Leger	Louisiana House of Representatives
Representative Sherman Mack	Louisiana House of Representatives
Senator Danny Martiny	Louisiana State Senate
Rev. Gene Mills	Louisiana Family Forum
Hon. Laurie White	Louisiana Sentencing Commission

Thank you as well to the Hon. Bonnie Jackson, 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court, for her participation on the Task Force.

The state received technical assistance from The Pew Charitable Trusts as part of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, a public-private partnership between Pew and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance.

The entire Louisiana Reinvestment Task Force Report is available on the Louisiana Supreme Court's website: [http://www.lasc.org/documents/LA\\_Task\\_Force\\_Report\\_2017\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.lasc.org/documents/LA_Task_Force_Report_2017_FINAL.pdf)