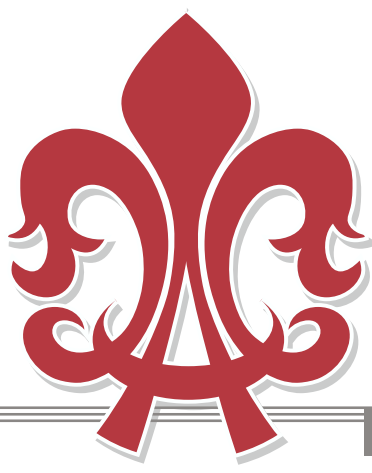


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La. spent \$7.7M on death penalty defense

Public defender's office bill high, despite more than a decade without execution

Julie O'Donoghue
Louisiana Illuminator

Louisiana spent \$7.7 million providing legal defense to people facing the death penalty in 2022, according to the Louisiana Public Defender's Office, even though the state hasn't executed anyone in 13 years.

The most recently Louisiana has put someone to death was Gerald Bordelon in January 2010, after he waived his

right to legal appeals and fast-tracked his own killing. Prior to his death, Louisiana hadn't executed anyone since 2002.

State officials told a federal judge last spring they haven't been able to obtain the drugs needed to carry out a lethal injection in years and stopped scheduling executions as a result. Gov. John Bel Edwards also doesn't appear to be enthusiastic about capital punishment. He has refused to share his personal views on

the death penal

Regardless of whether executions are moving forward, Louisiana must provide a vigorous defense for people who face death sentences. Federal law requires robust legal services and extra scrutiny for capital crimes.

The Louisiana Public Defender Board outsources most of the state's capital defense to five nonprofit organizations with attorneys who specialize in death penalty defense. Four of them – Louisiana Crisis Assistance Center, Capital Post-Conviction Project of Louisiana, Baton Rouge Capital Conflict, Inc. and the Capital Appeals Project – were among the top 10 most expensive legal

contracts in all of state government in the last budget cycle, according to a state report on government contracts.

The \$7.7 million spent last year covered initial trials, appeals and post-conviction legal challenges. It also includes approximately \$195,000 for expert witnesses and extra funding to the public defender's office in Jefferson Parish, which handles some of its own capital cases, according to State Public Defender Rémy Voisin Starns.

In 2022, there were only 18 open capital cases and two appeals across the state, Starns said, but his office is also

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Kelsie Judice disinfects countertops at Shoetique on Hector Connolly Road in Carencro. SCOTT CLAUSE/USA TODAY NETWORK

Louisiana businesses used telework less than most states

State's workers didn't have option of staying home during COVID

William Taylor Potter
Lafayette Daily Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

About 21,000 businesses in Louisiana continued to use telework in some capacity during the summer of 2022 – accounting for close to one-fifth of all businesses in the state – though the rate has dropped sharply since the COVID-19 pandemic, data shows.

New data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics showed an estimated 10,246 business establishments had all their employees using telework all the time in August and September 2022, accounting for an estimated 8.9% of the state's establishments.

An additional 10,823 businesses used

An estimated 30,951 Louisiana employees worked for businesses using all telework, accounting for about 2% of Louisiana's private sector employees. That 2% ranked 44th of 53 U.S. states and territories. About 197,050 were at businesses with some telework, which was about 13% of private sector workers, ranking 51st.

at least some telework for some employees during those months, making up about 9.4% of businesses.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Louisiana has one of the lowest rates of businesses utilizing telework options, the data shows. Of all 53 U.S. states and territories, Louisiana's percentage of businesses using all telework ranked 37th, and the percentage of those using at least some telework ranked 50th.

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ployees worked for businesses using all telework, accounting for about 2% of Louisiana's private sector employees. That 2% ranked 44th of 53 U.S. states and territories. About 197,050 were at businesses with some telework, which was about 13% of private sector workers, ranking 51st.

Louisiana saw its use of telework increase rapidly during the pandemic, when the state implemented a lockdown for several months. But even then, Louisiana did not embrace telework as readily as other states, the data shows.

During the pandemic, 29,420 businesses increased their use of telework, the BLS estimated, ranking 28th of 52 areas. About 26.2% of the state's businesses used telework more during the pandemic, ranking 45th.

Prior to the pandemic, an estimated 15,609 businesses had any employees

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Sexual violence report 'woefully inadequate'

Greg LaRose
Louisiana Illuminator

A state senator who's called for greater accountability from Louisiana colleges about sexual misconduct on campuses isn't pleased with the amount of information administrators are providing.

Sen. Beth Mizell, R-Franklinton, authored a law last year that requires public two- and four-year schools to report twice annually how they handle power-based violence complaints.

Power-based violence is defined by the Louisiana Legislature as interpersonal attacks meant to control or intimidate someone. That includes sexual misconduct but also expands beyond it.

She and other members of the Senate Select Committee on Women and Children received the first report a week ago, and Mizell described it as woefully inadequate.

"There's a real breakdown between receiving the complaint and taking any action on what's taken place," Mizell told the Illuminator in an interview.

State Higher Education Commissioner Kim Hunter Reed presented the report to the committee.

It covers rape, assault, stalking, harassment, dating violence, verbal intimidation and inappropriate comments, based on a copy of the report available on the Board of Regents website.

Over the six-month period last year – April 1 through Sept. 30 – there were 52 complaints filed at 17 schools. In almost every case, it is not disclosed whether they were filed by people who say they experienced misconduct and assault, or university staff, who are required to report to school administrators when they hear about or witness power-based violence.

Complainants and respondents are identified by gender.

Some 250,000 students are enrolled in Louisiana's two- and four-year public institutions, which combined have thousands of employees.

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