

# **LOUISIANA** **PROGRESS**

**2021**

## **LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT**

**PART 1**

[Louisianaprogress.org](https://Louisianaprogress.org)



# PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

## Inform, Engage, Mobilize

Louisiana Progress works with citizens, community leaders, activists, advocates, students, and policymakers to **inform** Louisianans on important issues, **engage** people in the political process, and help them **mobilize** to fight for people-centered, solutions-driven public policies. Learn more about Louisiana Progress and sign up for alerts at [www.louisianaprogress.org](http://www.louisianaprogress.org).

## Bold Committed Leadership

Louisiana Progress’s leadership is committed to making lasting change by developing engaged, energized stakeholders who come together to work on a strategic, thoughtful, shared vision. We want to thank our board, staff, and college advocacy fellows for their commitment to impactful progressive change.

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- Melissa Flournoy
- Darrell Hunt
- Sherry Guarisco
- Carmen Weisner
- Julie Nice
- Sharon Howard
- Rhonda Gleason
- Alfreda Tillman Bester
- Lori Callais
- Taryn Branson

### Louisiana Progress Staff

- Peter Robins-Brown--Policy & Advocacy Director
- Charles Stephens--Communications & Outreach Director

### Louisiana Progress College Fellows

- Charles Barjon
- Ryan Castellon
- Nathaniel De La Pena
- Clare Lee
- Aria Rife
- Alexandra Thibodeaux

The Coalition for Louisiana Progress was formed in 2005 as a 501(c)3 organization. Louisiana Progress Action was formed in 2011 as a 501(c)4 organization.

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# INTRODUCTION

Louisiana Progress was present at the Capitol as a reliable voice for sane, smart public policies that improve the quality of life of the people of Louisiana. We are committed to understanding the complex issues at hand, learning the players, and affecting outcomes through testimony and relationships with law-makers, advocates, and stakeholders.

Over the course of the session, we published our weekly Monday Matters newsletter where we tried to keep our readers up to date on all that was happening in the Capitol. The session was at times driven by partisan animosity and national media-driven narratives, but a lot of progressive legislation made it into law, and the legislature mostly avoided enacting hyper-controversial legislation that was passed in other states.

However, the legislature did pass a controversial bill banning trans kids from playing school sports, a bill to allow people to carry guns without a permit or training, and some unnecessary election bills. Fortunately, the Governor vetoed the worst of these bills, setting the stage for a potential veto override session.

The progressive victories we saw this year are a testament to all of the advocates, activists, organizations, and citizens who decided to get involved in state policy-making.

*All of you who took part in the session, whether it was sending an email to a legislator or showing up in the Capitol building, deserve the thanks of the people of Louisiana.*

This is Part One of our Louisiana Progress 2021 Legislative Session Report, which highlights the work of Louisiana Progress and the work of many other advocacy organizations that are working to move Louisiana forward. In Part Two, we will look at important bills that didn't make it through the process, and issues that Louisiana Progress and our friends, allies, and partners will look to work on in the future.

## Louisiana Progress at the Capitol

### Clean Elections.

### Clean Water.

### Clean Cannabis.

Coming into the 2021 session, Louisiana Progress decided to focus on three topics: Clean elections, clean water, and clean cannabis. *Those turned out to be very exciting issues throughout the session, and they're ones we will continue to work on in the years ahead.*

# CLEAN CANNABIS

## Marijuana Decriminalization

Our big victory this session was helping to pass [House Bill 652](#), by [Rep. Cedric Glover](#), which decriminalizes possession of 14 grams or less of marijuana. The current punishment for a first offense is a maximum \$300 fine and/or 15 days in jail, with escalating punishments, including prison time, for subsequent offenses. Once HB 652 goes into effect on August 1, 2021, the maximum fine for possessing 14 grams or less of marijuana will be \$100 and/or a court summons, without the possibility for jail or prison time, no matter how many times someone is arrested for that offense.

*We are proud to have played a role in beginning to end marijuana prohibition in Louisiana.*

Along with Rep. Glover, credit is due to [Sen. Jay Luneau](#), who handled the bill on the Senate floor; Reps. [C. Denise Marcelle](#) and [Alan Seabaugh](#), who came together on the House floor in an act of bipartisanship to support the bill; Reps. [Richard Nelson](#) and [Candace Newell](#), who each introduced marijuana legalization bills that helped open up a path for decriminalization as a compromise measure; organizations like Common Sense NOLA that have been fighting on this issue for years; and the local officials in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport who paved the way for 652 by passing similar measures in their cities over the past few years.

When Gov. John Bel Edwards signed HB 652 into law, he made Louisiana the first state in the Deep South, and just the second state in the entire South, to significantly reform its marijuana laws (Virginia legalized marijuana earlier this year).

Rep. Glover made this victory possible with his leadership and vision, and the Louisiana Progress board, staff, and college advocacy fellows all supported him by explaining the legislation and encouraging legislators to become more comfortable with a nominally controversial issue.

Marijuana prohibition laws are disproportionately enforced against people who are Black and Brown, young, and low-income. Prohibition laws play a pivotal role in propagating the systemic, generational cycle of poverty and racism. Decriminalization will help alleviate some of that harm and relieve some of the pressure on the criminal legal system.

Removing incarceration as a punishment for this "crime" is also beneficial to law enforcement officers. Currently, they are tasked with enforcing a highly unpopular law. Instead of building trust between officers and the communities they serve, marijuana prohibition sows distrust between the two. In the current environment, that serves no one's interests.

## CLEAN CANNABIS

### The Future of Cannabis-Related Criminal Justice Reform

HB 652 is an important stepping stone to further cannabis-related criminal justice reform. We still need to provide automatic criminal records expungements for marijuana possession offenses, review convictions for simple marijuana possession to let people out of jail, and continue to move our state toward marijuana legalization and the \$100+ million in tax revenue that comes along with it (money we'd like to see used to directly fund Louisiana's courts so they stop levying usurious criminal fines and fees against the people of our state).

In the meantime, there's a lot of work to be done in our local governments to help law enforcement understand the implications and implementation of HB 652. We were also able to join the larger movement that we think will eventually bring legalized marijuana to Louisiana. Our work, along with the work of our allies, has likely hastened the timeline for Louisiana to reach that milestone, and [HR 1](#) by [Rep. Marcus Bryant](#), which establishes a commission to study marijuana legalization will be an important step in that process.

HB 652 which would decriminalize possession of small amounts of cannabis will take effect on August 1st.

HB - House Bill

HR - House Resolution

HCR- House Concurrent Resolution

SB - Senate Bill

SR- Senate Resolution

SCR - Senate Concurrent Resolution

## IN THE PRESS

*"Louisiana just became the first state in the Deep South to significantly decriminalize marijuana possession because there was a collective realization that the current prohibition regime is serving the interests of few, if any, people in our state," said Peter Robins-Brown, policy and advocacy director at Louisiana Progress Action, which pushed the bill in the Legislature.*

*We hope this is just the first of many common-sense reforms to Louisiana's marijuana laws, and yet another important step toward ending our state's over-incarceration crisis."*

[The Advocate, June 15th 2021](#)

## CLEAN ELECTIONS

*Under the Clean Elections banner, we tracked, and often testified, on more than a dozen bills. We were most active in:*

### Redistricting

Redistricting is a top priority for Louisiana Progress, so we were heavily involved in the two redistricting-related measures this session:

- [SB 163](#) by [Sen. Patrick McMath](#), was intended to address some significant problems in our State Supreme Court districts, which haven't been properly redistricted in decades.

The populations in each district vary widely and racial representation on the Court is not proportional. Only one of the seven seats is a majority-minority district when state demographics indicate there should be two or even three. We tracked the bill as it moved through the process, engaging stakeholders to better understand its potential impacts. While we were initially excited about the effort, too many red flags were raised throughout the process and the bill eventually died in the session's final days.

- [House Concurrent Resolution 90](#) by [Rep. Clay Schexnayder](#), was an initial attempt to outline guidelines for the redistricting process. We applaud the legislature for taking these initial steps to ensure the process is transparent by setting up a redistricting website for the public and including public testimony.

The Legislature's efforts at redistricting will affect who votes, who gets elected and how our people are represented in Congress and in the state legislature, on the State Supreme Court, and on BESE (Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the PSC (Public Service Commission). We look forward to engaging citizens and legislators as redistricting unfolds over the coming months.

### Voting Machine Procurement

Fortunately, Louisiana legislators didn't file voter suppression bills on the level of what was passed in Georgia, Texas, and Florida. Instead, voting machines became the biggest hot-button election-related issue. We worked effectively with the Secretary of State's office to help frame some of the election bills and provide background on ensuring election integrity while continuing to make sure all citizens can easily cast their vote.

[HB 653](#) by [Rep. Barry Ivey](#) and [SB 221](#) by [Sen. Sharon Hewitt](#) dealt with the state's voting machine procurement process. On the last day of the session, the compromise was to combine these two bills to ensure the integrity of the procurement process, including requiring machines that provide a paper trail.



# CLEAN ELECTIONS

## Opposing Bad Bills

We fought to kill or amend some problematic voting related legislation this session, and were able to have some impact in that area. But a few bills we were opposed to did pass, so we then advocated for the Governor to veto them, and/or we plan to come back next year to address the issues they could cause:

- [SB 4](#) by [Sen. Ed Price](#), removes the cap on the amount of money that can go into a PAC (there is a campaign finance transparency argument to be made in favor of this bill.)
- [SB 224](#) by [Sen. Heather Cloud](#), was amended numerous times, and ended up requiring voters to provide unnecessary personal information on absentee ballots that could expose them to privacy violations
- [HB 138](#) by [Rep. Les Farnum](#), will impose a second annual voter-roll canvas that is unnecessary from both a procedural and cost perspective
- [HB 704](#) by Rep. [Valarie Hodges](#), would open up our polling locations to voter intimidation and hyper-partisan politicking

*Of these four bills, SB 224 and HB 704 are the most problematic, and we urged the Governor's staff to advise him to veto them.*

Testimony from our Board Chair Melissa Flournoy on clean elections is featured below.



# CLEAN WATER

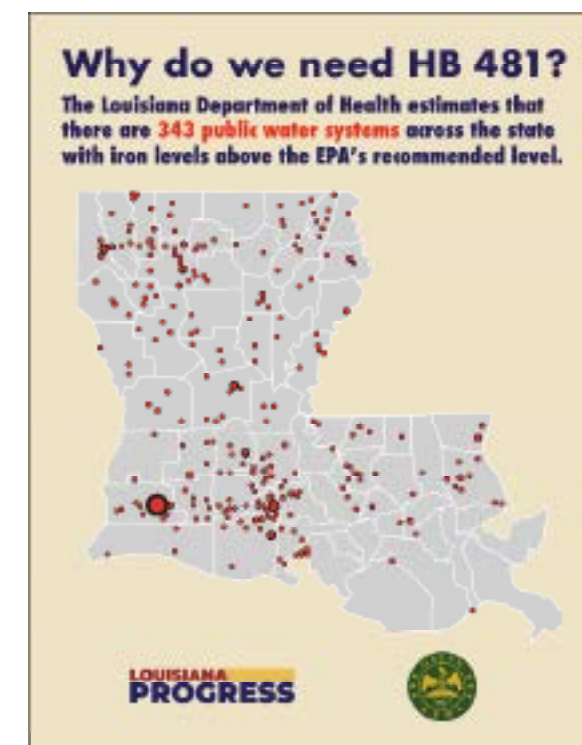
As Clean Water advocates, Louisiana Progress worked with [Rep. Matthew Willard](#) on [HB 481](#), which would have required community water systems to test for iron in their drinking water. High levels of iron can indicate high levels of contaminants, including lead. The bill was voluntarily deferred due to resistance from the Louisiana Department of Health. Louisiana Progress will continue to dive more deeply into the issue and build relationships with stakeholders and experts.

Our work on clean water also gave us the opportunity to support [SB 129](#) by [Sen. Fred Mills](#), which creates and provides for the Community Drinking Water Infrastructure Sustainability Act. The Act will establish a grading system for community water systems so we can better understand and address Louisiana's safe drinking water crisis.

Louisiana Progress worked with [Together Louisiana](#) to oppose [SB 203](#), by [Sen. Bodi White](#), to retroactively exempt three district commissioners on the Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission from provisions of the Code of Governmental Ethics. Those commissioners work for corporations that draw from the local aquifer, creating a potential conflict of interest. The bill made it through the process, and is awaiting the Governor's signature or veto.

Fortunately, legislators across the political spectrum understand that clean, safe drinking water is an existential issue for our state. The Legislature has already directed \$300 million in federal funding to fixing failing water systems, and there could be more to come, depending on negotiations around a potential federal infrastructure bill.

That money, while substantial, will only begin to address a backlog of water infrastructure projects in the state that likely totals billions of dollars in unfunded needs. Louisiana Progress will be a part of the process of addressing Louisiana's systemic water problems, efficiently distributing available dollars, and making sure water concerns are addressed equitably.



# COLLEGE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FELLOWSHIP

Louisiana Progress College Legislative Advocacy Fellowship program selected six Fellows--Ryan Castellon, Aria Rife, Charles Barjon, Alexandra Thibodaux, Nathaniel De La Pena, and Clare Lee. These outstanding young leaders and their hard work, passion, intellect, and empathy were largely responsible for our accomplishments this year.

This was the first iteration (Spring) of our new seasonal college fellowship program, with new cohorts coming in for a new 10-week program each season. Our goals are for students to learn about the political process, effectively advocate on issues they care about, and learn how to organize other students.

During the Spring Fellowship program, the fellows focused on research and communications projects, received community organizing training, and spent at least one day a week during the session at the Capitol. An essay from each Fellow reflecting on their experiences during the program will be available at [Louisianaprogress.org](https://Louisianaprogress.org).

If you or someone you know is a Louisiana college student who is interested in the program, please contact Peter Robins-Brown at [peter@louisianaprogress.org](mailto:peter@louisianaprogress.org) to learn more.



# IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

## Successful Progressive Advocacy Campaigns

During the fiscal session, the [Louisiana Budget Project](#) was the most active progressive-aligned group working on budget and tax issues, while the [United Way of Southeast Louisiana](#) (UWSELA), the [Louisiana Policy Institute for Children](#) (LPIC), and the [Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families](#) (LPCF) also did outstanding work on taxes and early childhood care and education. The [Sexual Trauma Awareness Response](#) (STAR) lived up to its acronym, leading the way on sexual abuse and harassment legislation. Their work is detailed in later sections.

There were plenty of other successful progressive advocacy campaigns this session. We're grateful for the opportunity to get to work with and support the following initiatives that were led by incredible advocates who are working every day to make Louisiana a better place to live:

- [Together Louisiana](#) was a constant presence at the Capitol this year, with a focus on budget and tax bills. They also led the successful effort to kill [SB 205](#) by [Sen. Bodi White](#), which would have broken up BREC, the East Baton Rouge Parks & Recreation department.
- [Voice of the Experienced](#) (VOTE) was, as always, a leading voice in the criminal justice reform movement. They brought five bills, four of which passed, including:
- [HB 84](#) by [Rep. C. Denise Marcelle](#), to allow formerly incarcerated people to serve on juries once they are five years removed from incarceration.
- [HB 106](#) by [Rep. Barbara Carpenter](#), to require defense attorneys and/or judges to inform arrestees of the collateral consequences of pleading guilty to a crime
- [HB 145](#) by [Rep. Marcus Bryant](#), which expands "good time" parole eligibility options to all currently incarcerated Louisianans.
- [HB 378](#) by [Rep. Sam Jenkins](#), to streamline the voter registration process for people who are on probation but were never in prison.
- [Louisiana Trans Advocates](#) successfully killed all four pieces of anti-trans legislation. Three of the four didn't make it out of committee, and the fourth, [SB 156](#) by [Sen. Beth Mizell](#), to ban Trans kids from participating in school sports, was vetoed by Gov. Edwards. Louisiana Progress and the [Forum for Equality](#) also provided testimony against all four bills.
- The [ACLU of Louisiana](#) was involved in almost every fight in the building, but their signature piece of legislation was [HB 46](#) by [Rep. Ted James](#), which reduces the amount of time a person can spend in pretrial detention before charges are filed.
- The [Power Coalition for Equity and Justice](#) did their usual excellent work on voting rights issues, leading the way on passing [HB 286](#) by [Rep. Fred Jones](#), which adds four more days of early voting during Presidential elections, and [HB 285](#) by [Rep. Ted James](#), to allow voters an extra three minutes in the voting booth.



## IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

- [Step Up Louisiana](#) made its presence felt at the Capitol by advocating for the passage of [HB 707](#) by [Rep. Matthew Willard](#), to create the Fair Chance Hiring Act to make it easier for formerly incarcerated people to find employment. Step Up also fought to increase weekly unemployment insurance benefits and keep federal UI benefits flowing into the state for as long as possible.
- [Families & Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children](#) (FFLIC) were the driving force behind [HB 411](#) by [Rep. Jason Hughes](#), a comprehensive reform of Louisiana's student discipline rules.
- The [Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center](#) (LAFHAC) had two big victories to protect renters with [HB 375](#) by [Rep. Aimee Freeman](#), which ensures survivors of sexual assault can end their leases early and without penalty, and [HB 374](#) by [Rep. Royce Duplessis](#), which gives renters the chance to explain a pandemic-related eviction when applying for housing, and will require landlords to tell tenants about their screening requirements before charging an application fee.
- [Moms Demand Action--Louisiana](#) successfully fought several gun bills. But their biggest victory was in leading the effort to kill [SB 118](#) by [Sen. Jay Morris](#), which would have allowed Louisianans to carry concealed weapons without requiring a permit or any training. Gov. Edwards showed that he is more in touch with the 80+% of Louisianans who opposed this kind of legislation by vetoing the bill, with Moms' resistance helping to provide him with the necessary political and moral cover to do so.
- [Operation Restoration](#) also had a good session, passing both bills they backed: [HB 325](#) by [Rep. Ed Larvadain](#), which requires that arresting officers assess whether an arrestee has a child dependent and, if they do, then all efforts should be made to put the child in the care of a family member, friend, or neighbor, instead of immediately being placed in the foster care system, and [HB 248](#) by [Rep. Ted James](#), to virtually eliminate the monthly fee that people on unsupervised parole pay (they currently pay the same monthly fee as people who are on supervised parole).
- [Innocence Project New Orleans](#) was able to pass one of its top priorities, [HB 92](#) by [Rep. Joseph Marino](#), which will increase the amount of money paid out to people who have been released after being wrongfully convicted.

*This, surely, isn't a comprehensive list, but we've tried to capture as many of the victories as we could. And there are still more to go. In the following sections, we'll look at other major pieces of legislation from the session, highlighting the work of progressive advocates in those areas.*

## Criminal Justice & Police Reform

Many of the victories listed above were related to reforming Louisiana's broken criminal justice system. But there were still other victories in that arena, as well as reforms to the way law enforcement polices our communities. Some of those other victories include:

- [SB 34](#) by Sen. Cleo Fields, requires law enforcement agencies to set up rules for police body cameras and dashboard cameras, and prohibits law enforcement officers from using choke holds, carotid holds, and no-knock warrants (except in very limited circumstances).
- [HB 430](#) by [Rep. Ted James](#), brings necessary reforms to the Officer's Bill of Rights.
- [HB 216](#) by [Rep. Royce Duplessis](#), eliminates administrative fees, costs, and taxes related to juvenile delinquency cases.

## IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

### Tax "Reform"

Tax reform was probably the biggest story of the session, and for the first time in decades there will be major changes to the state's tax code. But that will only happen if voters approve multiple constitutional amendments on October 9.

The package of bills that passed the legislature includes three bills:

- [SB 159](#) by [Sen. Bret Allain](#), is a constitutional amendment that removes both the individual and corporate federal income tax deduction, but it also sets a maximum top individual income tax rate of 4.75% in the state's constitution, and it includes provisions for automatic tax reductions when certain revenue targets are met.
- [HB 278](#) by [Rep. Stuart Bishop](#), eliminates the individual federal income tax deduction, trading it for lower income tax rates across the board. It also eliminates excess itemized deductions, except for medical deductions.
- [HB 292](#) by [Rep. Neil Riser](#), eliminates the corporate federal income tax deduction from statute in exchange for new, lower corporate tax rates.

Money saved by eliminating the Federal Income Tax Deduction, which almost entirely benefits corporations and higher income households, could have been used to invest in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Instead, that revenue was used to reduce tax rates in a way that will primarily benefit corporations and higher income households.

The [Louisiana Budget Project](#) did a great job [summing up these bills](#) (and others) through the lens of their impact on low- and moderate-income households in Louisiana.

Centralized sales tax collection has been a long-time top priority for the business community, who say it will put us more in line with how sales taxes are collected in other states. That reform will finally get done if voters approve a constitutional amendment to create a single sales tax collection board that was added to the ballot when the Governor signed [HB 199](#) by [Rep. Clay Schexnayder](#), into law.

There were a few wins for progressive taxation, particularly:

- [HB 7](#) by [Rep. Aimee Freeman](#), to eliminate the so-called "Pink Tax", which is the sales tax charged for feminine hygiene products and diapers. This is a big win for Louisiana's women and families, and it reflects the amazing work of Rep. Freeman and a huge advocacy lift led by [United Way of Southeast Louisiana](#) (UWSELA) and the Legislative Agenda for Women (LAW).
- [HB 678](#) by [Rep. Royce Duplessis](#), extends the sunset on the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a tax break for low-income households.
- [HB 680](#) by [Rep. Jason Hughes](#), creates the Louisiana Youth Jobs Tax Credit Program to encourage employers to hire unemployed and disadvantaged young people.

## IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

### Protecting & Empowering Women

With the LSU sexual assault and harassment scandal dominating headlines in the months leading up to the session, creating safer environments for women became one of the headline issues heading into the session. The Louisiana Select Committee on Women and Children, STAR, and many advocacy organizations worked to clarify the responsibilities for reporting Title IX infractions at Louisiana's higher education institutions, including:

- [HB 394](#) by [Rep. Neil Riser](#), requires postsecondary education institutions to post reports relative to campus security policies and campus crime statistics on their websites.
- [HB 409](#) by [Rep. Aimee Freeman](#), to bring more accountability to the process of reporting sexual harassment complaints by requiring that a higher education employee who fails to comply with power-based abuse committed by or against a student be fired from their job.
- [SB 133](#) by [Sen. Regina Barrow](#), which provides relative to the prioritization of health equity by the Louisiana Department of Health.
- [SB 230](#) by [Sen. Beth Mizell](#), which significantly expands the Campus Accountability and Safety Act, and requires criminal justice agencies, including campus police forces, to report acts of sexually oriented criminal abuses.

Other notable victories dealing with sexual assault and harassment include:

- [HB 379](#) by [Rep. Ed Larvadain](#), to allow for liability damages for sexual assault in the workplace.
- [SB 170](#) by [Sen. Ronnie Johns](#), to create the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention.
- [SB 215](#) by [Sen. Regina Barrow](#), which provides greater workplace protections for pregnant women and new mothers.
- [HB 12](#) by [Rep. Malinda White](#), to create an income tax checkoff for the [Sexual Trauma Awareness Response](#) (STAR) organization. STAR was the lead advocate on many of the sexual abuse- and harassment-related legislation above, so make sure to donate to them using this new income tax checkoff when you file.

### Early Childhood Education

Early childhood care and education (ECE) almost came out of the session empty-handed, which would have been disastrous given the already gaping funding hole that they face. But in the end, ECE got a significant boost in funding from sports gambling. [SB 142](#) by Sen. Rick Ward, commits 25% of sports betting revenues, up to \$20 million per year, to the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund. This victory is largely due to the unceasing advocacy of the [Louisiana Policy Institute for Children](#) (LPIC) and the [Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families](#) (LPCF), United Way of Southeast Louisiana and the Ready Coalition.

Other notable wins for childhood-related issues were:

- [HB 492](#) by [Rep. Jason Hughes](#), expands the window of time when people who survived childhood sexual abuse can file civil lawsuits.
- [SB 151](#) by [Sen. Regina Barrow](#), enacts the Foster Youth's Bill of Rights for youth ages fourteen through eighteen in foster care.

## IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

### Education

The most contentious education issue revolved around the national obsession with Critical Race Theory. The now-former Chair of the House Education committee, [Rep. Ray Garofalo](#), filed [HB 564](#) which would have banned schools from teaching about systemic racism and sexism. The bill was poorly worded and Rep. Garofalo couldn't define Critical Race Theory. He just knew it was bad.

Speaker Schexnayder unsuccessfully urged Garofalo to shelve the bill, but he refused. That decision backfired on Garofalo. During the hearing on the bill, he said schools needed to teach about "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of slavery. That comment drew a sharp rebuke from committee member [Rep. Stephanie Hilferty](#), who pointed out the obvious--there was no "good" about slavery.

The rest of the hearing was similarly charged. Louisiana Progress, faculty from LSU and Southern, and other education advocates passionately argued that we need to teach facts so we can deal with our history and the on-going implications of that history. He was forced to voluntarily defer the bill, but that was just the beginning. Within days, the "good, bad, and ugly" comment became a national news story that once again reflected poorly on the state of race relations in Louisiana.

Instead of recognizing the error of his ways, Rep. Garofalo doubled down with a half-baked apology and then tripled down with a campaign where he tried to make himself into the victim. The Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus called for Garofalo to be removed from his Chairmanship. After a couple weeks of confusion over whether Garofalo was still Chair of the committee, Schexnayder officially removed him.

[Rep. Valarie Hodges](#) also sponsored politically driven education bills, [HBs 352](#) and [416](#) to require schools to teach about World War II, American exceptionalism, and globalism. These bills were part of a national agenda to politicize public education, but they failed to pass here.

Beyond these controversies, there were also some notable wins for Louisiana's education system, with some of them coming in the state's annual operating budget, which included extra funding for:

- Murphy J. Foster Promise Bill for Training at Technical Colleges
- TOPS and Go GRANTS
- Small pay raises for teachers and support staff



## IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

The legislature also passed:

- [SB 10](#) by [Sen. Cleo Fields](#), to require mandatory kindergarten for Louisiana children.
- [SB 234](#) by [Sen. Patrick McMath](#), to provide expanded academic support using federal Covid relief funds.
- [HB 85](#) by [Rep. Scott McKnight](#), to create the Steve Carter Literacy Program.
- [HB 635](#) by [Rep. Cedric Glover](#), provides that a course in African-American History shall satisfy certain requirements relative to qualification for TOPS scholarships.

### Healthcare

There were a few notable reforms in the healthcare space with [HB 270](#) by [Rep. Tanner Magee](#), which expands “telemedicine” and “telehealth” availability. [HB 391](#) also by Rep. Magee, authorizes medical marijuana in raw or crude form. And there additional funding for behavioral health included in the budget bill, [HB 1](#).

The Louisiana Center for Health Equity (LCHE) worked tirelessly to create an office of Women’s Health through [HB 193](#) by [Rep. Denise Marcelle](#). The bill unfortunately did not pass.

The right to access abortion health care continue to be attacked. Legislators brought an assortment of anti-choice bills. [LIFT Louisiana](#) and the [Louisiana Coalition for Reproductive Freedom](#) led the fight against:

- [HB 357](#) changes the law in order to prevent minors from going to a judge outside of their home parish, seriously limiting young people’s access to abortion.
- [HB 423](#) increases the information collected by the health department on each abortion, creating privacy concerns for patients who have abortions.
- [HB 578](#) would require doctors and the state to provide information to patients that could endanger their lives if acted upon. Following a medical protocol that is not scientifically proven, this bill will put pregnant people in danger by instructing doctors to give misleading and likely dangerous information to their patients.

### Infrastructure & Capital Outlay Projects

It’s usually difficult to find funding for infrastructure, especially in Louisiana, with our billions of dollars in unmet infrastructure needs for roads, bridges, broadband access, and other state projects. But this year there was a large pot of money available from the federal COVID relief bill and American Rescue Plan. That meant legislators were competing for project funding in the Capital Outlay bill, and several Republican leaders were awarded funding for large projects in their districts.

However, the legislature wanted to create more long-term infrastructure funding, leading to the hijacking of [HB 514](#), by [Rep. Tanner Magee](#). Initially intended to create a sales tax on raw or crude medical marijuana, 514 was completely rewritten in the Senate to reroute motor vehicle sales tax revenue from the state general fund to the transportation trust fund.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

This is just Part One of our 2021 Legislative Session Report. In Part Two, we’ll look at some bills that didn’t pass this year, but that will need to be introduced again in the future, and the legislators and organizations who are leading on those issues. In many of those cases, the debate around the bill created momentum that we think will ultimately lead to meaningful change through passing policies and/or changing the narratives around important issues.

Part Two will also provide us with an opportunity to look ahead on the issues that we are particularly concerned with, and lay out some ideas and strategies that we think will lead to progress on those issues. We’ll be looking ahead on redistricting, campaign finance reform, legislator and legislative staff compensation, clean water initiatives, and the path to legal cannabis. Some of these issues will start to be addressed through the many study commissions and task forces that were established during the past session, and we’ll address those as well.

There were some successes this year. But there’s still a lot of work to be done, and getting it done will require all of us to pitch in and fight for a better Louisiana.

Louisiana Progress and the Southern University Law Center will be hosting a series of Legislative debrief sessions beginning at the end of July.



