

**EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH
CORONER'S OFFICE**



ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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A Letter from the Coroner



To the Citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish:

Enclosed you will find the Coroner's Annual Report for 2022. When I ran for the position of Coroner, my platform was based on four fundamental goals for the East Baton Rouge Parish Coroner's Office:

- Dignity for the Deceased
- Compassion for the Family
- Service to Law Enforcement
- Integrity of the Office

I promised you that I would work on your behalf to make the East Baton Rouge Parish Coroner's Office an office of which we can all be proud. As my eleventh year has come to an end, I am pleased to report that we have made great strides in accomplishing our goals and serving ALL citizens in East Baton Rouge Parish, regardless of gender, race or socio-economic status.

The following are just a few of our accomplishments for 2022:

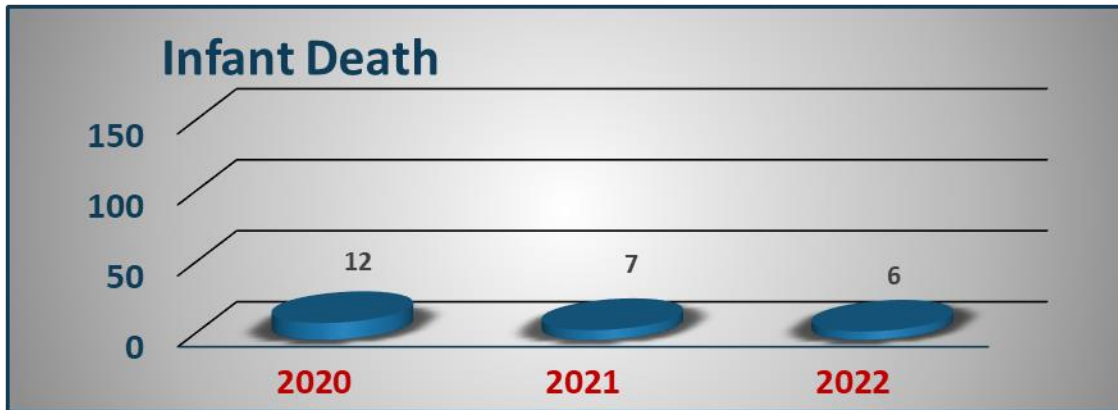
- We provided expert testimony in the Louisiana and Federal Criminal Court system.
- In accordance with Louisiana Statutes, we maximized collection of revenue totaling \$744,268.
- Although we had continued success as a revenue source with our Regional Autopsy Program, due to higher demand with forensic death cases in our parish, we were forced to reduce the number of outside parish autopsies so that we could focus on serving the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish.
- I continue to serve on multiple boards and committees.

While we accomplished much in 2022, there is more to be done in the coming year. Our focus for the future will involve several areas:

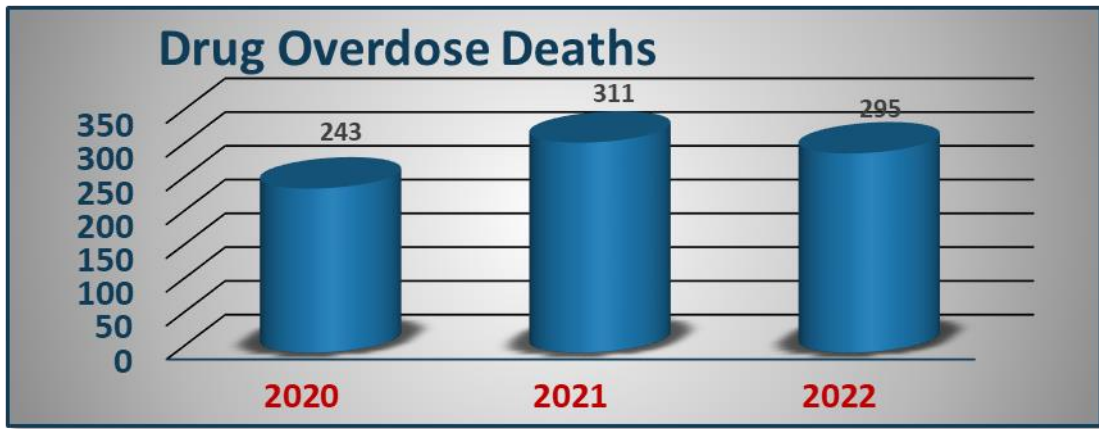
- **Death investigations-** I will maintain the gold standard of death investigation and continue to work with public leaders to reduce the rate of homicides and other preventable deaths in East Baton Rouge Parish.

As of December 31, 2022, I have investigated 39,970 deaths since taking office.

- **Infant Mortality-** My goal continues to be to prevent 100% of these tragic losses. In 2012, my office recognized the high number of infant deaths. We began working towards a solution. In 2016 my office participated in the Cribs for Kids Safe Sleep Initiative and formed a Safe Sleeping Task Force with regional stakeholders, and we saw a significant decrease in infant deaths. In 2022 we continued to focus on a Safe Sleep Education Campaign. We continue to distribute cribs to families to ensure they had a safe place to sleep their babies and we will continue this mission until we see our goal of zero infant deaths that were due to unsafe sleeping environments.



- **Opioid Deaths-** In 2022 my office continued an anti-opioid campaign which now includes the deadly drug, fentanyl. Our office worked with the Louisiana Opioid Task Force and the Office of the Governor, Crime Stoppers, and The Bridge Center for Hope, and When You Are Ready Community Campaign to create impactful public policies to protect our citizens. I will continue to address our opioid epidemic in both our death investigations and with those in our community suffering from substance abuse problems.



- Mental Health-** I will continue my efforts to implement an automated system for Physician Emergency Certificates and Coroner Emergency Certificates by working with Louisiana Department of Health and other stakeholders. I worked with community partners to open a new mental health stabilization center, The BRIDGE Center for Hope, to prevent the inappropriate incarceration of our citizens with mental illness and the overcrowding of emergency departments. Since the opening of The BRIDGE Center for Hope in 2021, they have served 5,038 of our citizens.

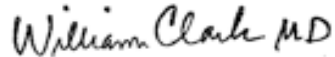
As of December 31, 2022, my office has issued, 11,480 Order of Protective Custodies and 79,835 Coroner Emergency Certificates since taking office.

- Sexual Assault-** When I took office in 2012, I recognized the need for all victims of sexual assault, including men, women and children, to receive appropriate, efficient and consistent forensic medical exams with the highest level of dignity and in full compliance with state law. Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) are best-practice when conducting forensic medical exams. In 2016, I successfully implemented a SANE protocol that includes not only East Baton Rouge Parish but the entire Louisiana Department of Health Region 2 of Ascension, Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge, Iberville, East Feliciana and West Feliciana. We have a solid team of SANEs with two full time SANEs, including our SANE Coordinator. We conducted 381 adult/adolescent and respond 24/7 to all victims of sexual assault.



Lastly, I would like to address the overwhelming hardships of 2022. From the residual effects of the COVID pandemic to an overwhelming number of homicides, motor vehicle collision deaths and overdoses, 2022 has tested our resolve as a community. I pledge to serve with continued tenacity to fulfill the promises I made when you saw fit to elect me. I understand that my staff and I are servants of this community and I pledge to be good stewards of your tax dollars.

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Clark MD". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

William "Beau" Clark, M.D.
East Baton Rouge Parish Coroner



About the Coroner's Office

In the United States of America, there are two systems charged with the jurisdiction to investigate deaths, a medical examiner system or a coroner system. A medical examiner system entails the Office of the Medical Examiner that is an appointed subdivision of state government. Medical examiners are usually forensic pathologists whose job it is to determine the manner and cause of someone's death. In contrast, coroners are typically elected and do not necessarily need to be medical professionals. Like the medical examiner, coroners are also charged with determining the manner and cause of someone's death; however, Louisiana has a unique system. In Louisiana, the office of the Coroner is an elected position and it is preferred that the position is held by a medical doctor. What makes Louisiana unique is that along with the responsibility of the death investigation, the Office of the Coroner has two additional jurisdictions: the involuntary committal of the mentally ill and the collection of forensic evidence in sexual assault cases.

According to Louisiana Revised Statute 13:5701, in each parish, there shall be a coroner. Except for the parish of Orleans, he shall be elected at the gubernatorial election, shall serve for a term of four years, and shall take office and begin his term on the fourth Monday in March following an election. The coroner shall be a conservator of the peace. Louisiana Revised Statute 13:5704 states that the coroner shall be a physician licensed by the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners to practice medicine in the state of Louisiana. This requirement shall be waived in any parish in which no licensed physician qualifies to run for the office. Each coroner may appoint one or more deputy or assistant coroners to perform his duties. The tenure of the appointment shall be determined by the appointing coroner but shall not be longer than the coroner's term of office. The coroner shall be responsible for the acts of his deputy or assistant coroners.

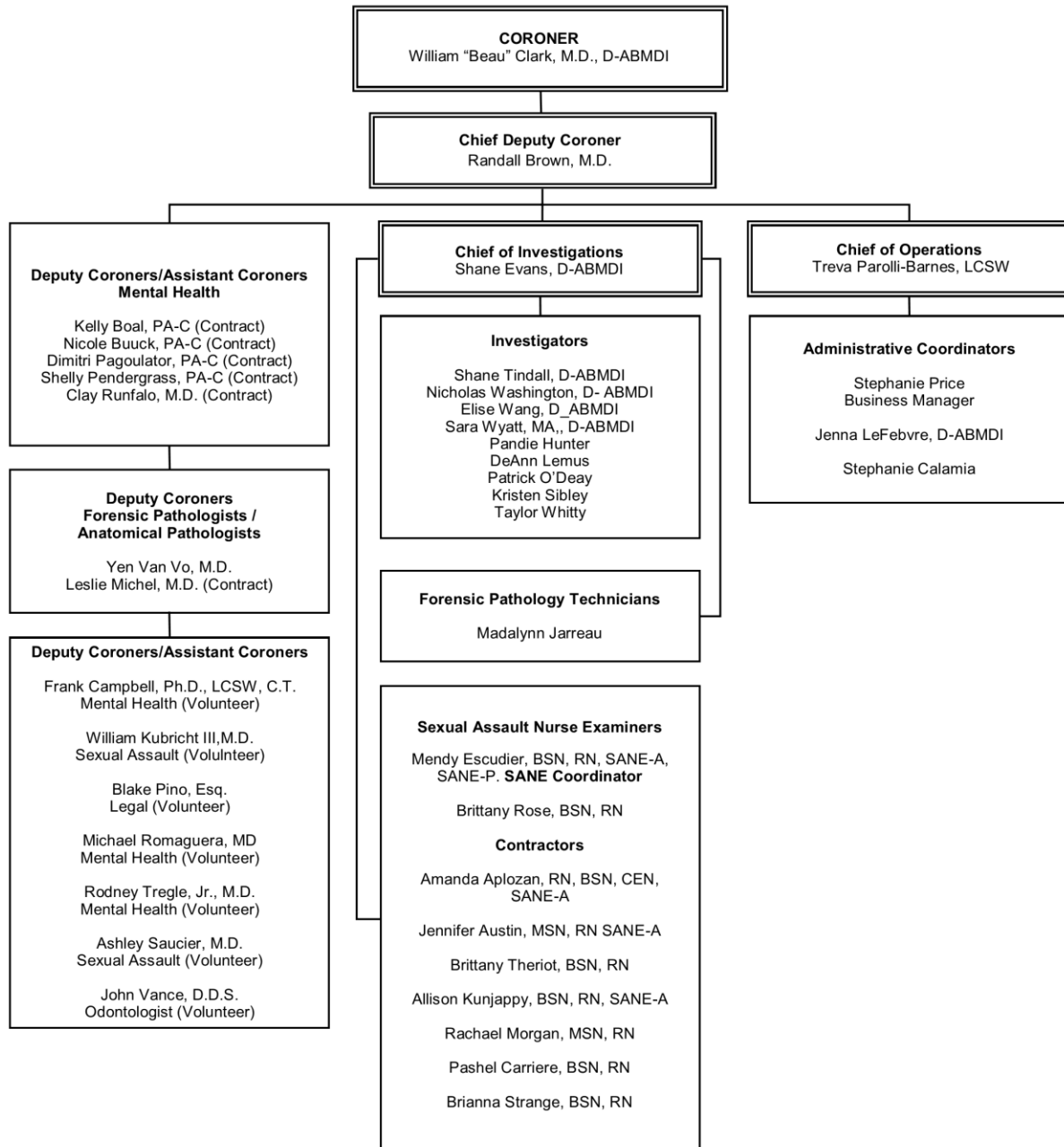
Many times, the public is not well-informed concerning the duties of the Coroner as they relate to the investigation of death. To clear up any misconceptions, the Coroner's job, as it relates to death investigations, is to determine the cause and manner of death through the application of science. The Coroner's job is to investigate death where there is a reasonable possibility that a violation of the criminal statute has occurred. Cause of Death is defined as the underlying medical condition, disease or injury that begins a lethal chain of events resulting in death. Manner of Death describes the way in which a death occurs, which may be one of five (5) categories, i.e., Homicide, Suicide, Accidental, Natural or Undetermined.

The East Baton Rouge Coroner's Office is a state governmental agency whose jurisdiction includes mental health investigation, medicolegal death investigation, and sexual assault investigation. The Coroner's Office is a state constitutional office and is funded by the East Baton Rouge City-Parish Government. William "Beau" Clark, M.D. was inaugurated as Coroner of East Baton Rouge Parish on March 26, 2012.

In the fall of 2015, Dr. Clark ran unopposed for a second term. He was sworn into office for this second term on March 11, 2016.

In the fall of 2019, Dr. Clark ran successfully for a third term and was sworn into office on March 18, 2020.

2021 Organizational Chart





Accomplishments

Financial Management

The approved 2022 operating budget was \$3,232,460. The amended 2022 operating budget was \$3,466,750. The final 2022 expenditures totaled \$3,594,759 with Revenues collected in the amount of \$744,268.

We continue to be fiscally responsible by pursuing all possible revenue sources.

Mental Health

We recognize the emotional needs of the survivors of those who have died. We continued to collaborate with with the Baton Rouge Children’s Advocacy Center and other community agencies to provide resources to the families who have suffered a traumatic loss. Traumatic loss can be defined as any manner of death including, accident, homicide, suicide, infant death, unexpected, and natural. We recognize the need for more expansive mental health resources. During 2022, we continued to work with individual community stakeholders to prevent inappropriate incarceration of our citizens with mental illness and the overcrowding of emergency departments and will continue to support these efforts.

Sexual Assault

The Coroner’s Office continued to enjoy a cooperative, invaluable relationship with members of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), including agencies such as the Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response Advocacy Center (STAR), the Baton Rouge Children’s Advocacy Center (BRCAC), local law enforcement, the East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney’s Office, surrounding hospitals, and the Louisiana State Police Crime Lab. In 2016, we succeeded with our efforts to redirect the assignment of collecting forensic evidence regarding sexual assault in this parish to the Coroner’s Office. We worked with Region 2 agency stakeholders, developed, and implemented a sexual assault response protocol that includes Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. In 2020, our SANEs completed training for the pediatric response to our program and expanded our response to all ages. We now respond to all victims 24/7.

Investigations

In 2022, the Coroner’s Office investigated:

- 136 homicides compared to 171 in 2021
- 295 deaths related to overdoses compared to 311 in 2021
- 6 infant deaths related to an unsafe sleeping environment compared to 7 in 2021
- 46 deaths related to suicide in comparison to 57 in 2021
- 104 Motor Vehicle Deaths compared to 78 in 2021

See Graph 1: 2022 Coroner’s Death Cases

Public Relations

Dr. Clark presented education and information to the following Community Partners in 2022:

- Crisis Intervention Training
- Louisiana Public Risk Management Association
- United Christian Faith Ministries
- Kiwanis Club
- Baton Rouge Roundtable
- Baton Rouge Area Society of Psychologists
- Red Stick Leadership Network
- Central Funeral Home Widow and Widowers Group
- Jones Creek Area Business Association
- LSU Student Christian Medical Society
- St. Jean Vianney's Men's Club
- St. Jude Men's Club
- OLOL Physicians Group Interns
- Celebrity Waiter – Baton Rouge Children's Advocacy Center
- The Ronald Reagan Newspaper
- Family Summit Jefferson Baptist Church
- Louisiana Hospital Association
- Louisiana State Medical Society
- Sunrise Rotary Club
- Baton Rouge Retired Social Workers
- OLOL Social Workers
- LSU Faculty and Staff Retirees
- LSU School of Social Work
- Capitol Area Human Services
- Catholic High School
- Episcopal High School
- St. Michael High School
- Most Blessed Sacrament Middle School
- ICARE

Community Programs and Partnerships

Board and Committee Participation

Dr. Clark actively participated in the following local, regional, and statewide boards and committees:

- Baton Rouge Regional Eye Bank
- Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response Center (STAR)
- State of Louisiana Child Death Review Panel

- State of Louisiana Regional Maternal and Child Health, Fetal Infant Mortality Review and Child Death Review Case Review Team
- Crisis Intervention, Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS)
- Capital Area Health and Human Services Collaborative
- Louisiana Behavioral Health Coalition
- Baton Rouge Victims Crime Unit
- The East Baton Rouge Parish Mayor's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness
- State of Louisiana Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Coalition for Region 2 Hospitals
- Past President of the Capital Area Medical Society
- Past President of the Louisiana State Medical Society
- Past President of the Louisiana Coroners Association
- Bridge Center for Hope Board
- Baton Rouge Community College Criminal Justice Advisory Board
- Governor's DWI Taskforce
- Baton Rouge Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Board Foundation
- Louisiana Mental Health Association
- Crime Stoppers

Key Business Partnerships

The East Baton Rouge Parish Coroner's Office continues to partner with the many entities to initiate and improve relationships to better serve the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish.

Educational Partnerships

The East Baton Rouge Parish Coroner's Office partnered with the following institutions to educate students and citizens in the area of death investigation, forensic science, sexual assault forensic medical examinations and mental health:

- Louisiana State University
- LSU School of Social Work
- Southern University
- Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing
- Fran U
- Central High School Sports Medicine Program
- East Baton Rouge Parish Emergency Medical Services
- Baton Rouge Community College
- East Baton Rouge Parish Fire Department Recruitment Trainees
- St. Michael the Archangel High School Forensic Science Program
- Episcopal High School
- Catholic High School
- Zachary High School Medical Program
- St. Joseph's Academy

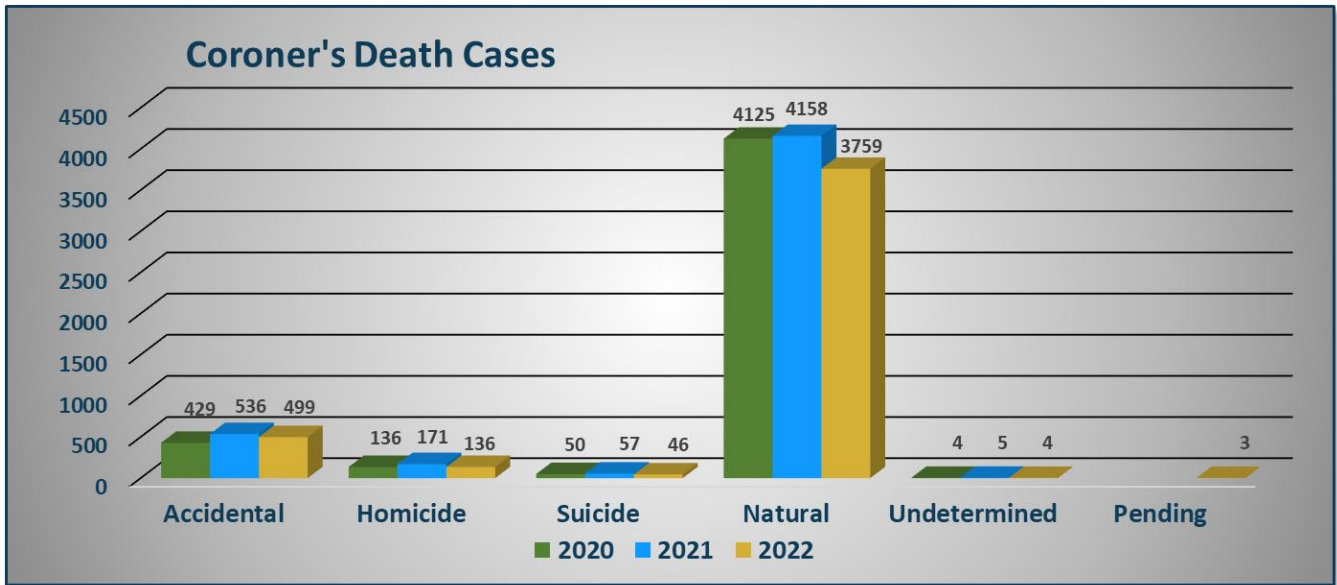
Statistical Information

Investigations

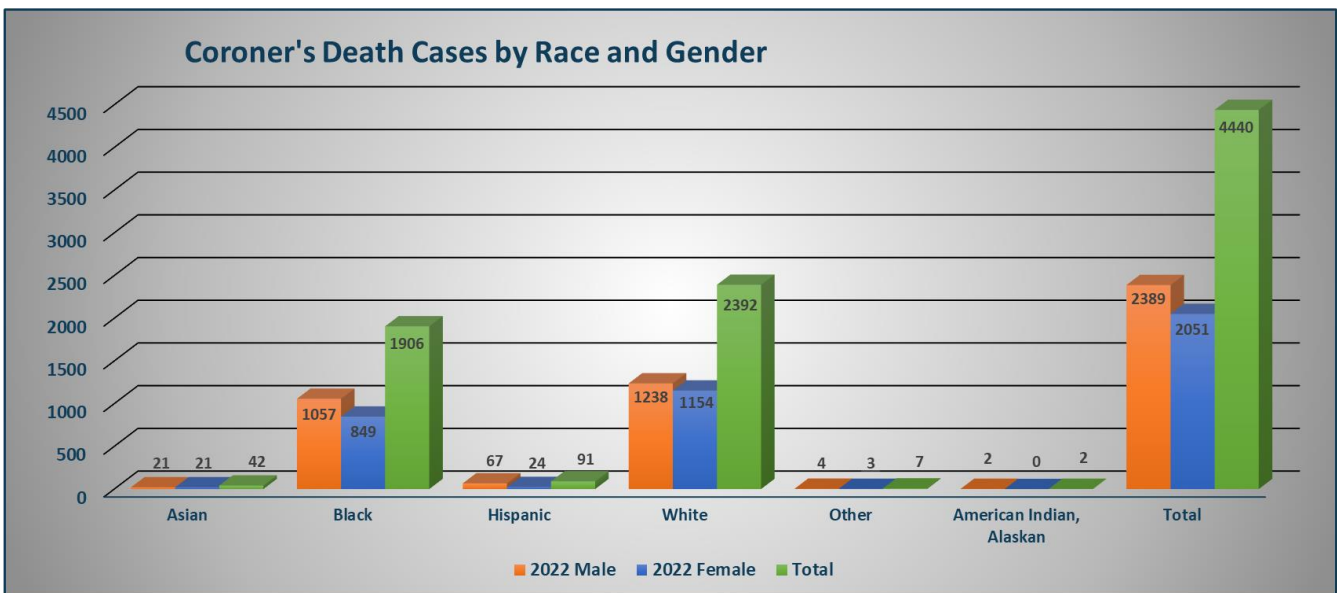
Type of Investigation	2020	2021	2022
<i>Number of Coroner's Death Cases</i>	4742	4921	4447
<i>Number of Death Certificates Signed</i>	3857	4016	3668
<i>Number of Bodies Transported</i>	489	541	464
<i>Number of Scene Responses</i>	1268	1387	1279
<i>Number of Toxicology Analysis Performed</i>	929	1003	825
<i>Number of Histology Analysis Performed</i>	67	41	51
<i>Number of Cremation Permits Issued</i>	1974	2157	2071
<i>Number of Pauper Cremations Facilitated</i>	85	74	103
<i>Number of Unidentified Bodies</i>	0	2	1
<i>Number of East Baton Rouge Parish Autopsies</i>	253	298	260
<i>Number of Regional Autopsy Program Autopsies</i>	194	98	24
<i>Number of Exhumations</i>	0	0	0
<i>Number of Sexual Assault Forensic Exams</i>	285	324	381
<i>Total Referrals to LOPA</i>	327	488	428
<i>Total Organ and Tissue Donations</i>	71	65	89
<i>Total of Enhanced Lives from Organ/Tissue</i>	2450	3710	7500
<i>Total Cornea Donations</i>	33	46	37
<i>Continuing Tutorships</i>	11	15	14

Graph 1: 2022 Coroner's Death Cases

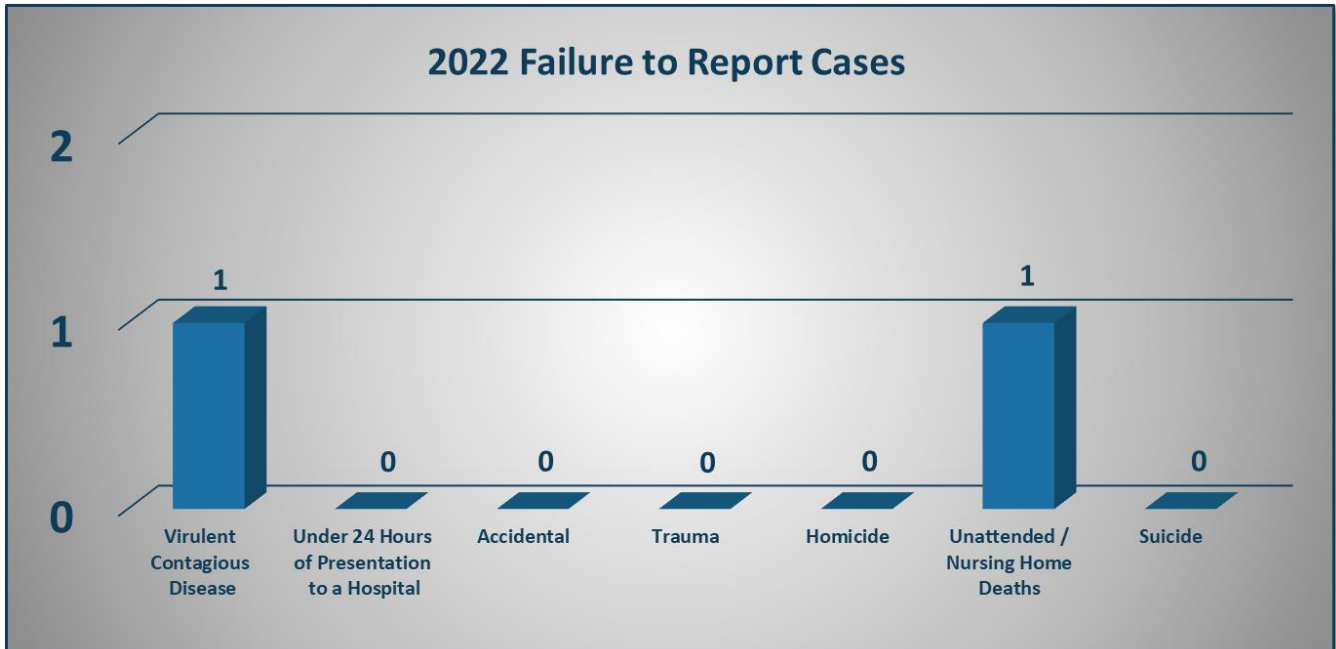
Compared to 2021 data, there were 37 less accidental deaths investigated in 2022. Homicides decreased by 35 and Suicides decreased by 11. Natural deaths decreased by 399 and the number of undetermined cases decreased by 1. Covid related deaths decreased by 403. Overall, the Coroner's Office investigated less deaths in 2022.



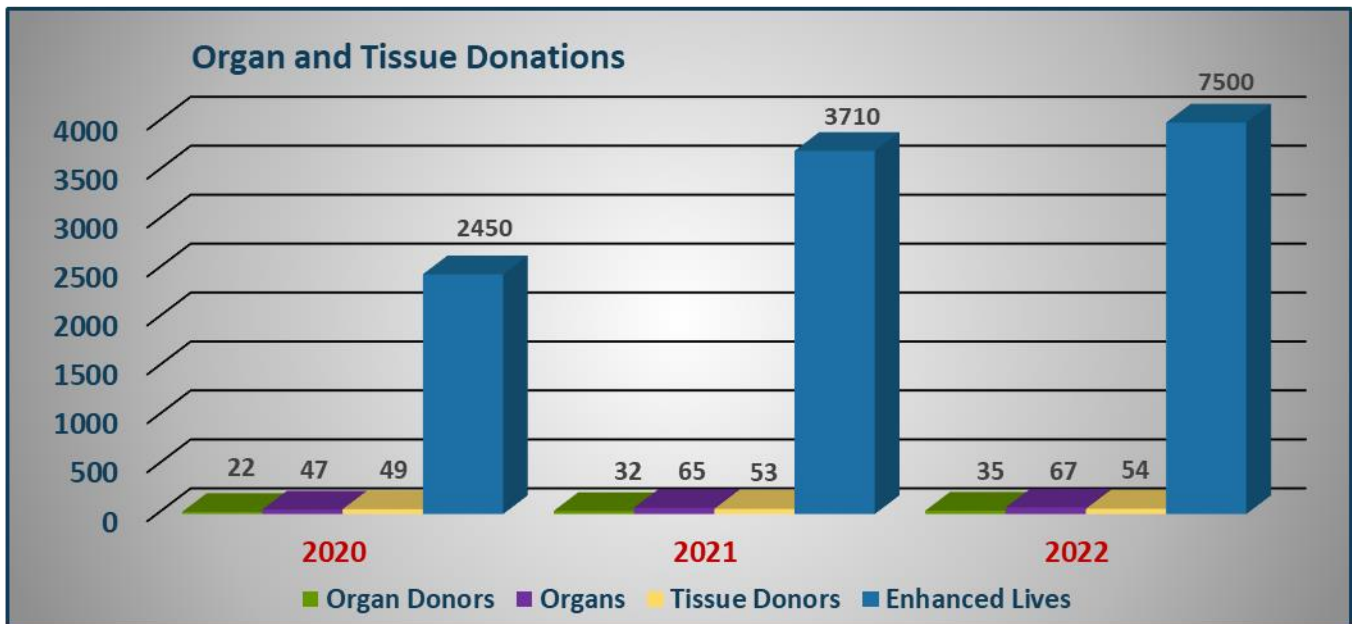
Graph 2: 2022 Coroner's Cases by Gender and Race



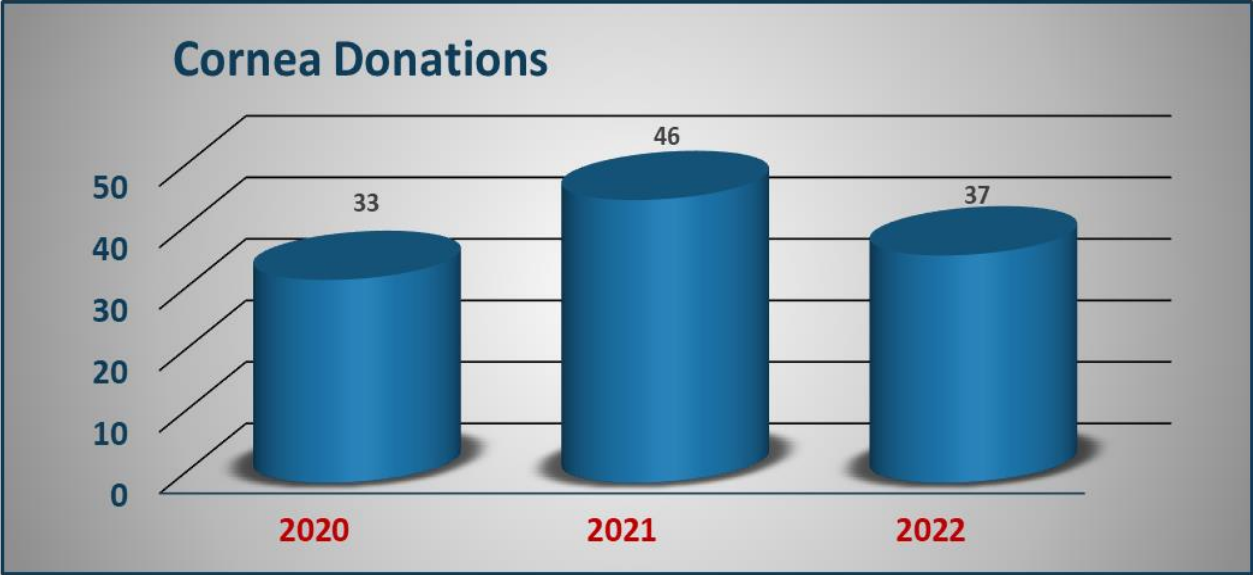
Graph 3: 2022 Failure to Report Coroner Death Cases



Graph 4: 2022 Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency Organ and Tissue Donations

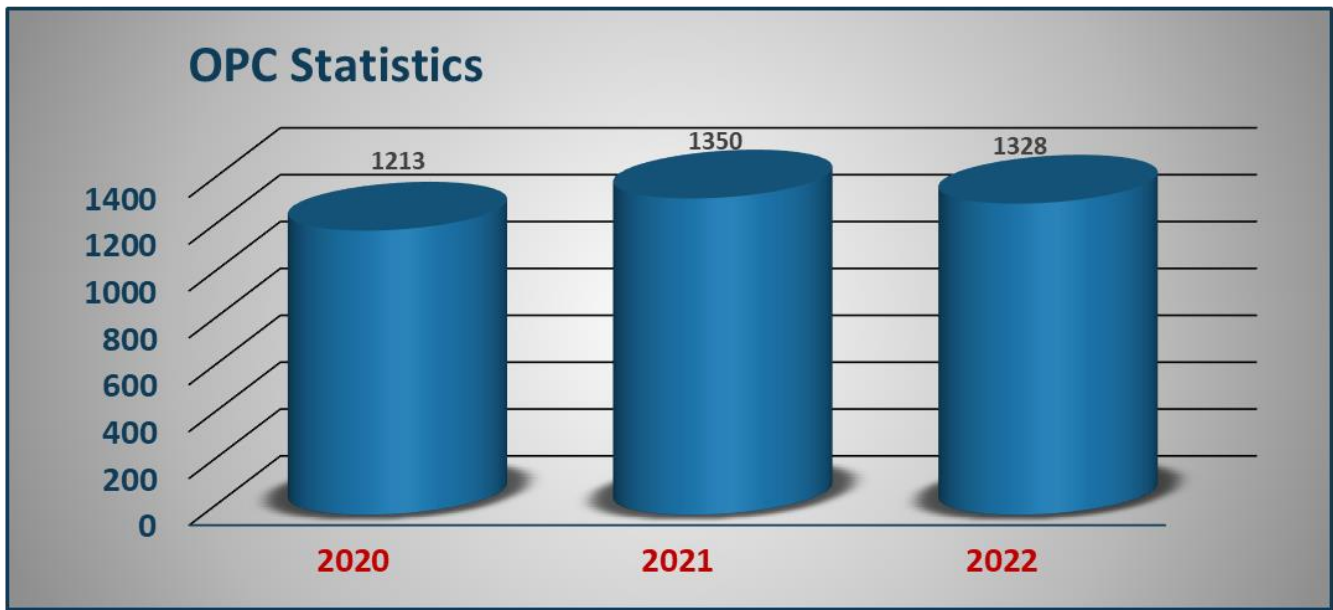


Graph 5: 2022 Baton Rouge Eye Bank Cornea Donations



Mental Health

Graph 6: 2022 Order of Protective Custody (OPC)



Graph 7: 2022 Coroner Emergency Certificate (CEC)

