

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



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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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 2020. 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 ninth 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 2020:

- We provided expert testimony in the Louisiana and Federal Criminal Court system.
- In accordance with Louisiana Statutes, we maximized collection of revenue totaling \$861,762.99.
- We are having continued success with our Regional Autopsy Program - Ascension (98 cases), Pointe Coupee (5 cases), West Feliciana (37 cases), Livingston (37 cases), Concordia (8 cases), and East Feliciana (9 cases).

- I now serve a second term as President of the Louisiana State Coroner's Association.
- I continue to serve on multiple boards and committees.

While we accomplished much in 2020, 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.
- **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 2020 we continued to focus on a Safe Sleep Education Campaign. We distributed 26 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 2020 my office continued an anti-opioid campaign. Our office worked with the Louisiana Opioid Task Force and the Office of the Governor 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.
- **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 285 adult/adolescent and respond 24/7 to all victims of sexual assault.

Lastly, I would like to address the overwhelming hardships of 2020. From the COVID pandemic to an all-time record year of homicides, motor vehicle collision deaths and overdoses, 2020 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 cursive script that reads "William Clark MD".

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.

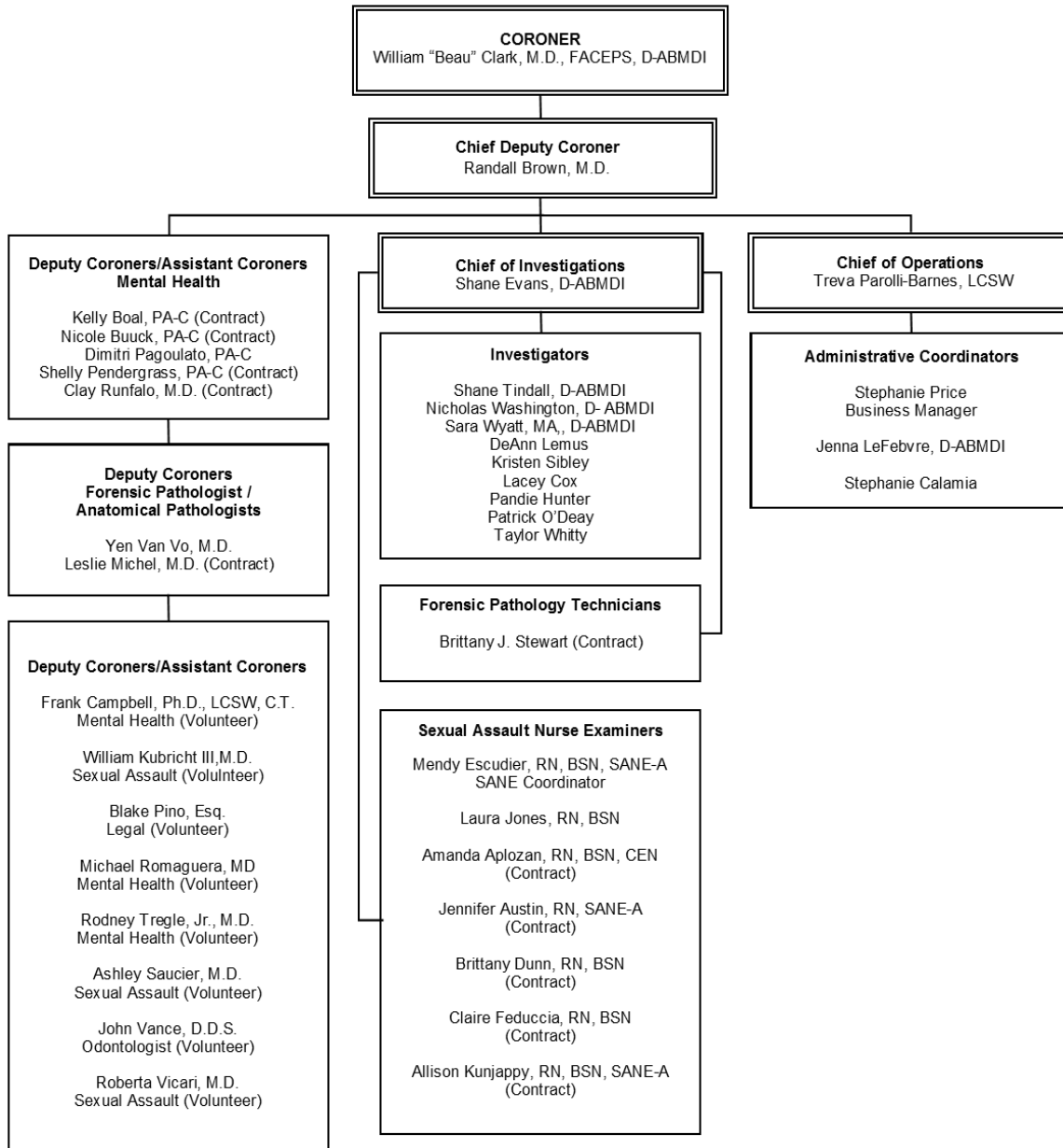
According to Louisiana Revised Statute 13:5701, in each parish, there shall be a coroner. Except for the parish of Orleans, he shall be elected at the gubernatorial election, shall serve for a term of four years, and shall take office and begin his term on the fourth Monday in March following an election. 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.

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.

2020 Organizational Chart





Accomplishments

Financial Management

The approved 2020 operating budget was \$3,017,690. The amended 2020 operating budget was \$3,297,690. The final 2020 expenditures totaled \$3,302,455.

We continue to be fiscally responsible by pursuing all possible revenue sources. We have increased SGR from 12% when I took office to 26% in 2019. See previous annual reports for details.

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 2020, we worked with individual community stakeholders along with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and Capital Area Human Services District to develop a plan for a new mental health stabilization center, the BRIDGE Center for Hope, 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 continue to respond to victims 24/7.

Investigations

In 2020, the Coroner's Office investigated:

- 136 homicides compared to 97 in 2019
- 193 deaths related to heroin and fentanyl in comparison to 99 deaths in 2019
- 48 non-heroin/fentanyl overdoses as compared to 27 in 2019
- 12 infant deaths related to an unsafe sleeping environment compared to 8 in 2019

- 50 deaths related to suicide in comparison to 65 in 2019
- 88 Motor Vehicle Deaths compared to 66 in 2019

See Graph 1: 2020 Coroner's Death Cases

Public Relations

Dr. Clark presented education and information to the following Community Partners in 2020:

- Woman's Hospital Baby Grand – “Back to Sleep and the ABC's of Safe Sleeping”.
- Crisis Intervention Training
- Celebrity Waiter – Baton Rouge Children's Advocacy Center
- Louisiana Hospital Association
- Louisiana State Medical Society
- National Association of Social Workers Conference
- Baton Rouge Press Club
- Sunrise Rotary Club
- LSU Public Safety Day
- Baton Rouge Retired Social Workers
- Baton Rouge Rotary Club
- Baton Rouge Area Chamber
- OLOL Mary Bird Perkins Social Workers
- LSU Faculty and Staff Retirees
- Louisiana Dental Association
- Baton Rouge Nurses Association
- LSU School of Social Work
- Capitol Area Human Services

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 and Intervention, Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS)
- Capital Area Health and Human Services Collaborative and the Mental Health Court
- 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
- Louisiana Coroners Association President
- Bridge Center of Hope Board
- Baton Rouge Community College Criminal Justice Advisory Board

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
- Southern University
- Our Lady of the Lake School of Nursing
- 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
- Zachary High School Medical Program
- St. Joseph's Academy

Statistical Information

Investigations

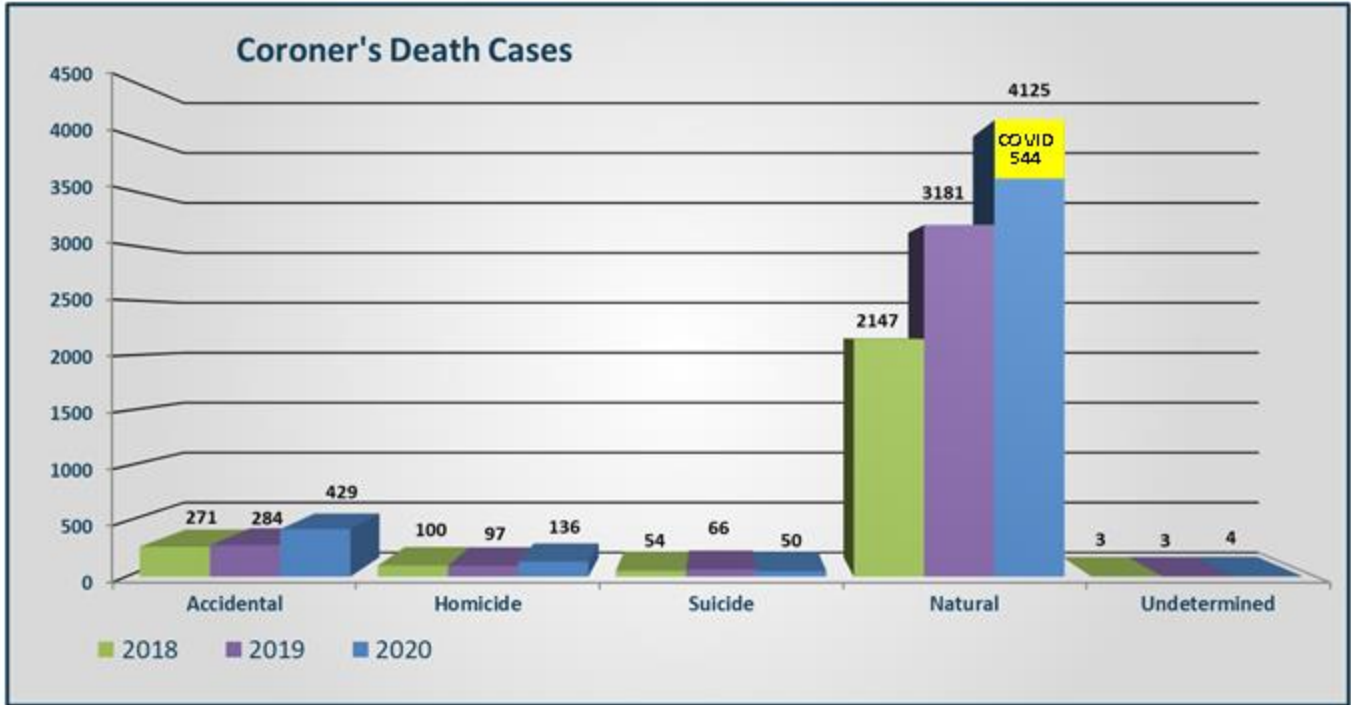
Type of Investigation	2018	2019	2020
<i>Number of Coroner's Death Cases</i>	3583	3625	4742
<i>Number of Bodies Transported</i>	391	356	489
<i>Number of Scene Responses</i>	1049	987	1268
<i>Number of Toxicology Analysis Performed</i>	777	799	929
<i>Number of Histology Analysis Performed</i>	72	77	67
<i>Number of Cremation Permits Issued</i>	1406	1481	1974
<i>Number of Pauper Cremations Facilitated</i>	81	60	85
<i>Number of Unidentified Bodies</i>	0	0	0
<i>Number of East Baton Rouge Parish Autopsies</i>	207	201	253
<i>Number of Regional Autopsy Program Autopsies</i>	260	262	194
<i>Number of Exhumations</i>	0	0	0
<i>Number of Sexual Assault Forensic Exams</i>	249*	261**	285
<i>Total Referrals to LOPA</i>	264	283	327
<i>Total Organ and Tissue Donations</i>	90	67	71
<i>Total of Enhanced Lives from Organ/Tissue</i>	1470	2590	2450
<i>Total Cornea Donations</i>	41	38	33
<i>Continuing Tutorships</i>	12	14	11

**SAFE Adults/Adolescents Only*

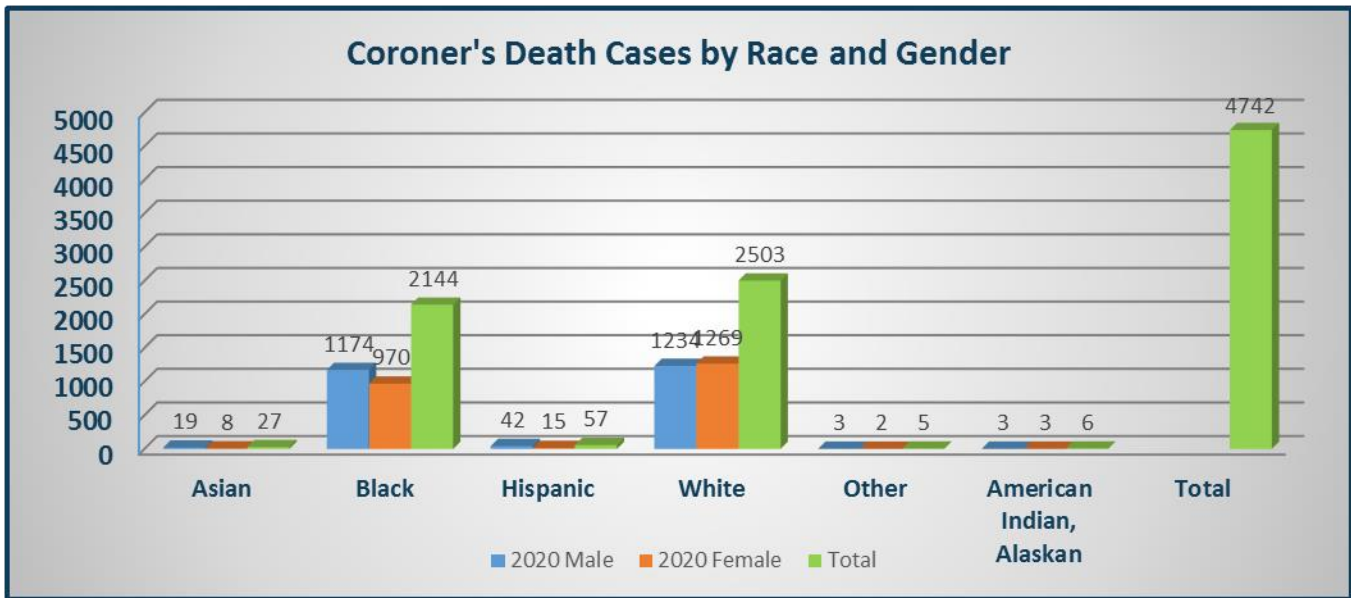
***July 1, 2019 began Sexual Assault Response for acute cases of all ages*

Graph 1: 2020 Coroner's Death Cases

Compared to 2019 data, there were 145 more accidental deaths investigated in 2020. Suicides decreased by 16. Natural deaths increased by 944 and homicides increased by 39. The number of undetermined cases increased by 1. Overall, the Coroner's Office investigated more deaths in 2020.



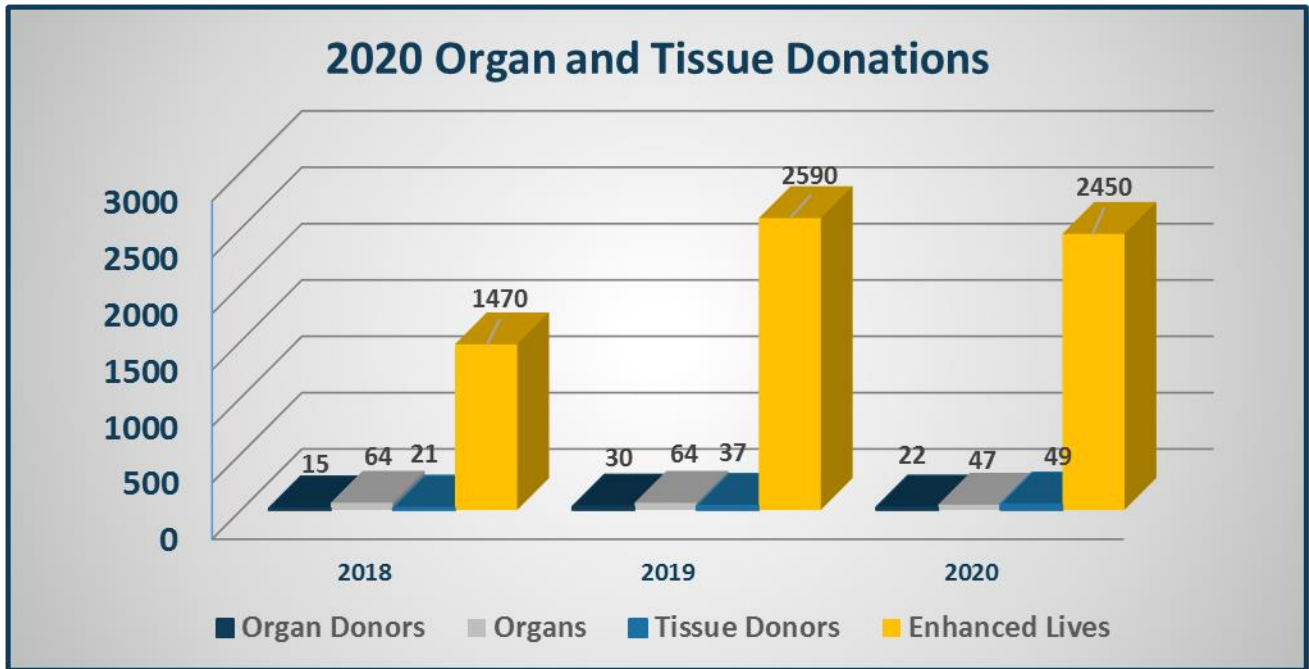
Graph 2: 2020 Coroner's Cases by Gender and Race



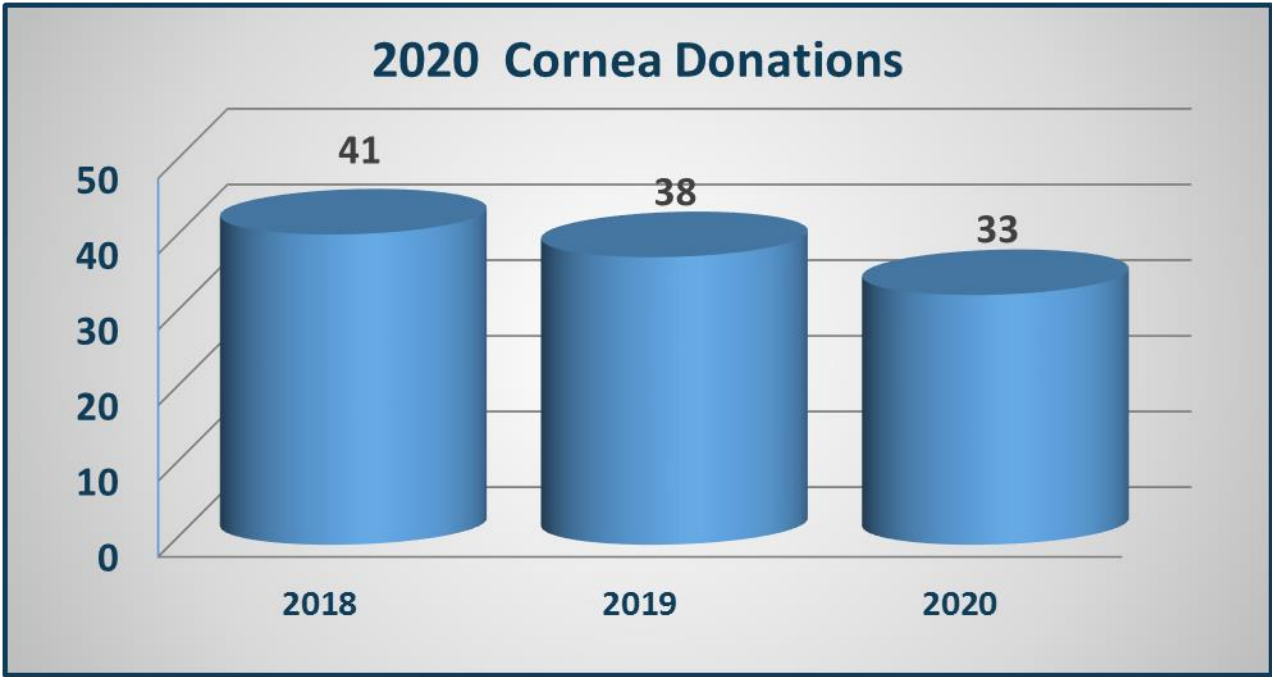
Graph 3: 2020 Failure to Report Coroner Death Cases



Graph 4: 2020 Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency Organ and Tissue Donations

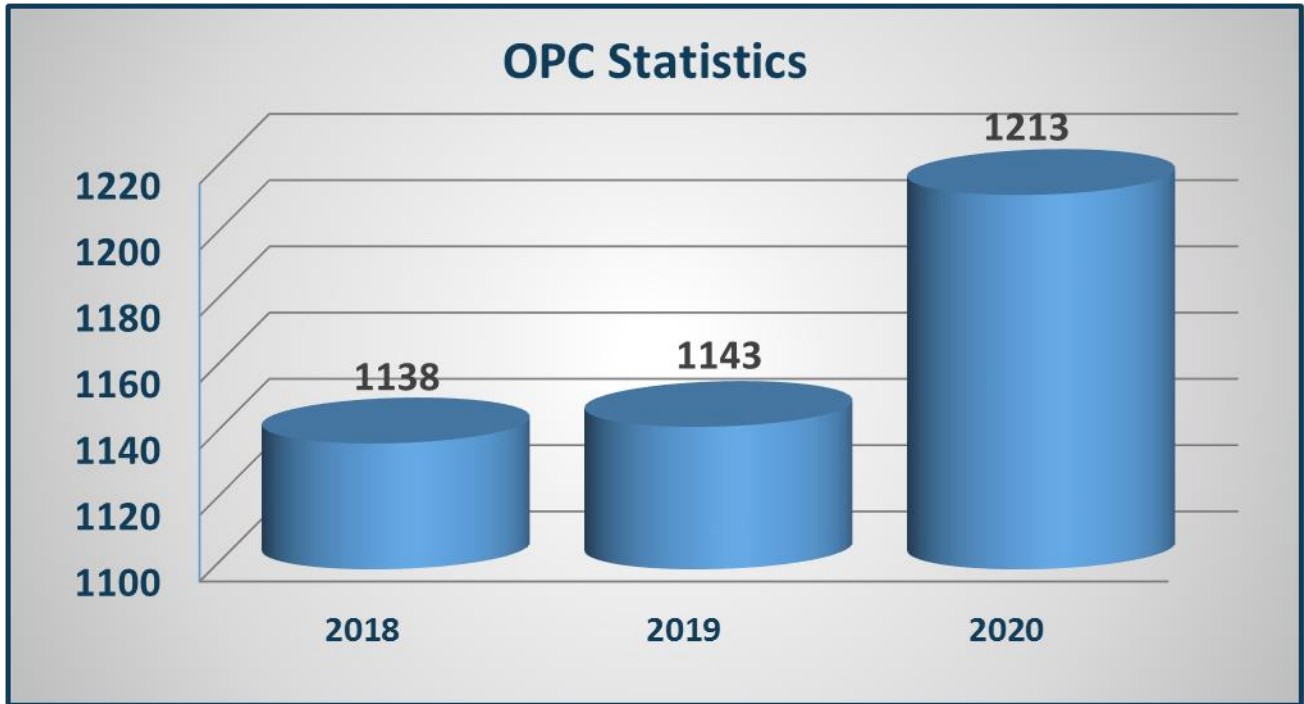


Graph 5: 2020 Baton Rouge Eye Bank Cornea Donations



Mental Health

Graph 6: 2020 Order of Protective Custody (OPC)



Graph 7: 2020 Coroner Emergency Certificate (CEC)

