

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



## **ANNUAL REPORT 2024**

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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 2024. 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 thirteenth 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 2024:

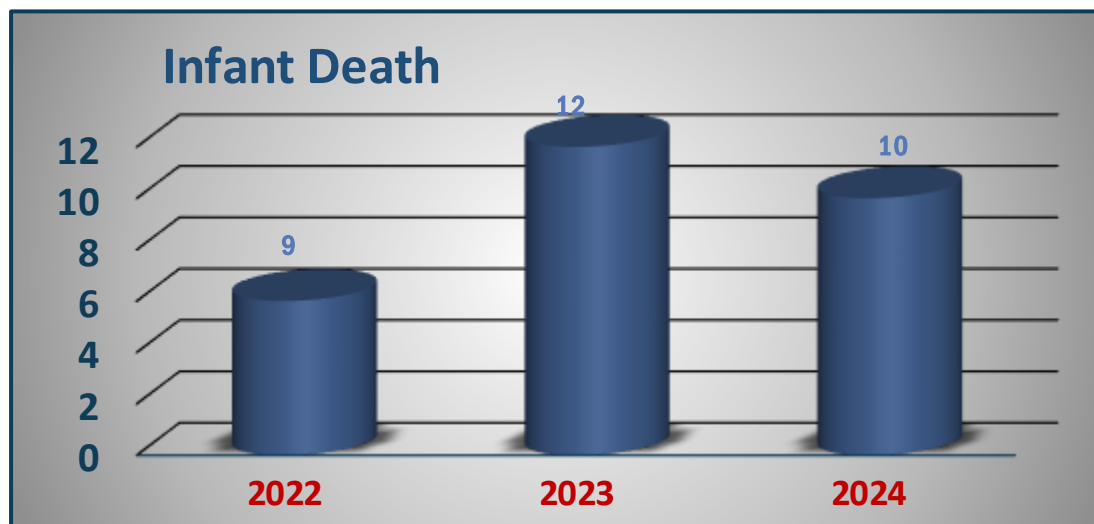
- We provided expert testimony in the Louisiana and Federal Criminal Court system.
- In accordance with Louisiana Statutes, we maximized collection of revenue totaling \$610,000.
- In 2024 my office faced additional revenue source reduction with a cut in our cremation fees due to an Attorney General Opinion.
- I continue to serve on multiple boards and committees.

While we accomplished much in 2024, there is more to be done in the coming year. Our focus for the future will involve several areas:

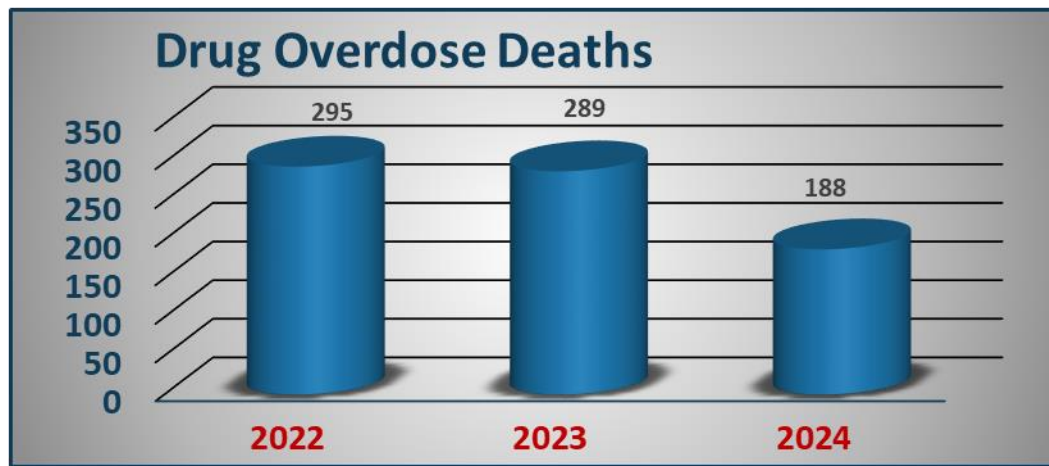
- **Death investigations-** I will maintain the gold standard of death investigation and continue to work with public leaders to reduce the rate of homicides and other preventable deaths in East Baton Rouge Parish.

As of December 31, 2024, I have investigated 48,330 deaths since taking office.

- **Infant Mortality-** My goal remains to make efforts 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. We continue to work with our community partners that focus on providing education and cribs to families to ensure they have a safe place to sleep their babies and we will remain steadfast in this mission until we see our goal of zero infant deaths that were due to unsafe sleeping environments.



- **Opioid Deaths-** In 2024 my office continued an anti-opioid campaign which now includes the deadly drug, fentanyl. Our office worked with both governmental agencies as well as peer support specialists to create impactful public policies to protect our citizens. East Baton Rouge saw a reduction in overdose deaths. This reduction can be attributed to community education, law enforcement interdiction and the mass distribution and utilization of Narcan. 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 and community partners to prevent the inappropriate incarceration of our citizens with mental illness and the overcrowding of emergency departments.

As of December 31, 2024, my office has issued, 14,118 Order of Protective Custodies and 96,660 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 one full time SANE Coordinator. Since the beginning of our program, we have conducted 2,561 adult/adolescent/pediatric sexual assault examinations and respond 24/7 to all victims of sexual assault.



My office serve the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish in their most challenging times. It is my commitment to do this with dignity and compassion. I continue my pledge to serve with 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.

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.

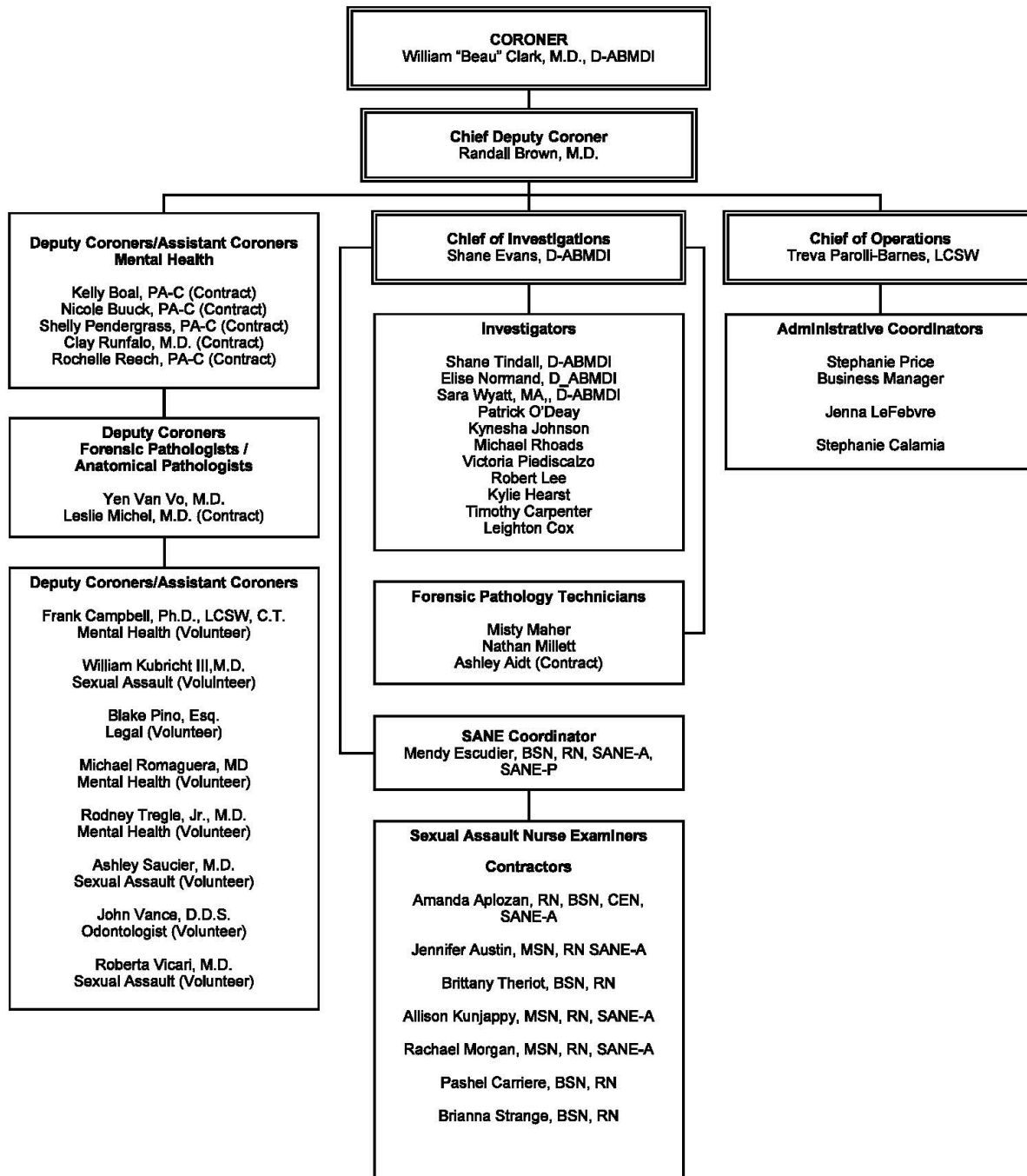
The East Baton Rouge Coroner's Office is a state governmental agency whose jurisdiction includes mental health investigation, medicolegal death investigation, and sexual assault investigation. The Coroner's Office is a state constitutional office and is funded by the East Baton Rouge City-Parish Government.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

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

In late fall of 2023, Dr. Clark ran unopposed for a fourth term. He was sworn into office for this fourth term on February 22, 2024.

# 2024 Organizational Chart





# Accomplishments

## Financial Management

The approved 2024 operating budget was \$3,752,160. The amended 2024 operating budget was \$4,010,604. The final 2024 expenditures totaled \$3,960,591 with Revenues collected in the amount of \$628,657.

**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 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 2024, 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 2024, the Coroner's Office investigated:

- 125 homicides compared to 107 in 2023
- 188 deaths related to overdoses compared to 289 in 2023
- 10 infant deaths related to an unsafe sleeping environment compared to 12 in 2023
- 51 deaths related to suicide equaled to 46 in 2023
- 76 Motor Vehicle Deaths compared to 66 in 2023

*See Graph 1: 2024 Coroner's Death Cases*

## **Public Relations**

Dr. Clark presented education and information to the following Community Partners in 2024:

- 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
- 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
- Capital Area Medical Society
- Louisiana State Medical Society
- 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

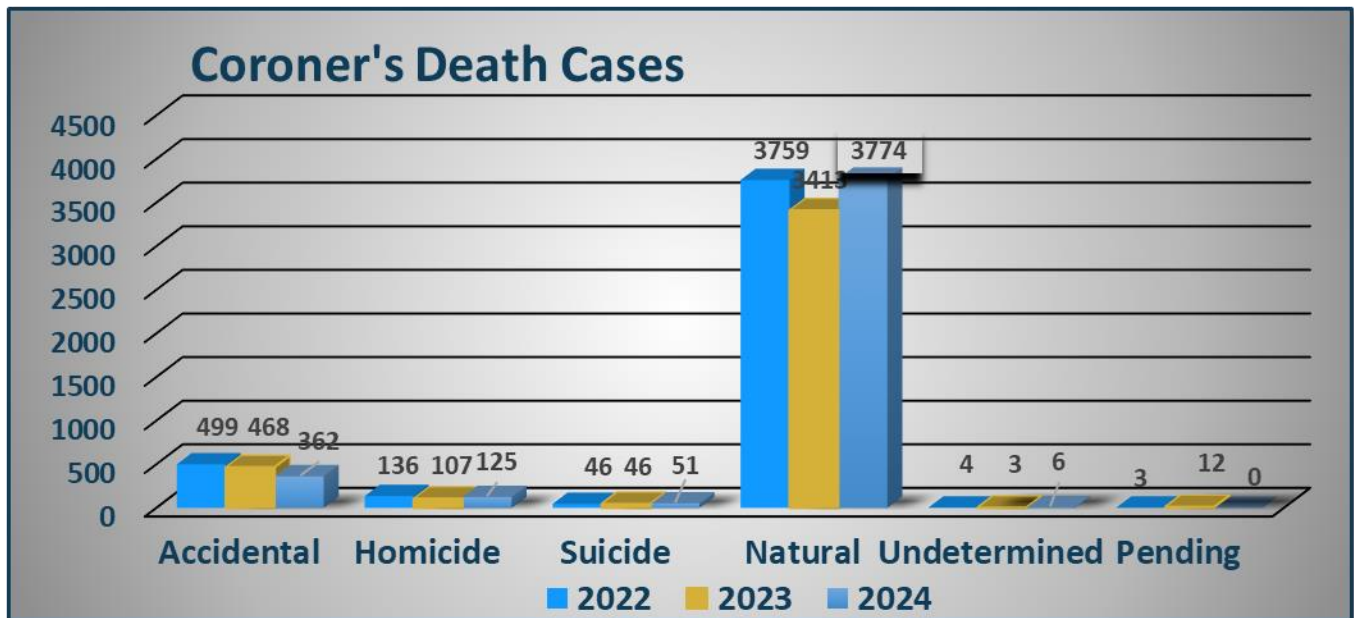
# Statistical Information

## Investigations

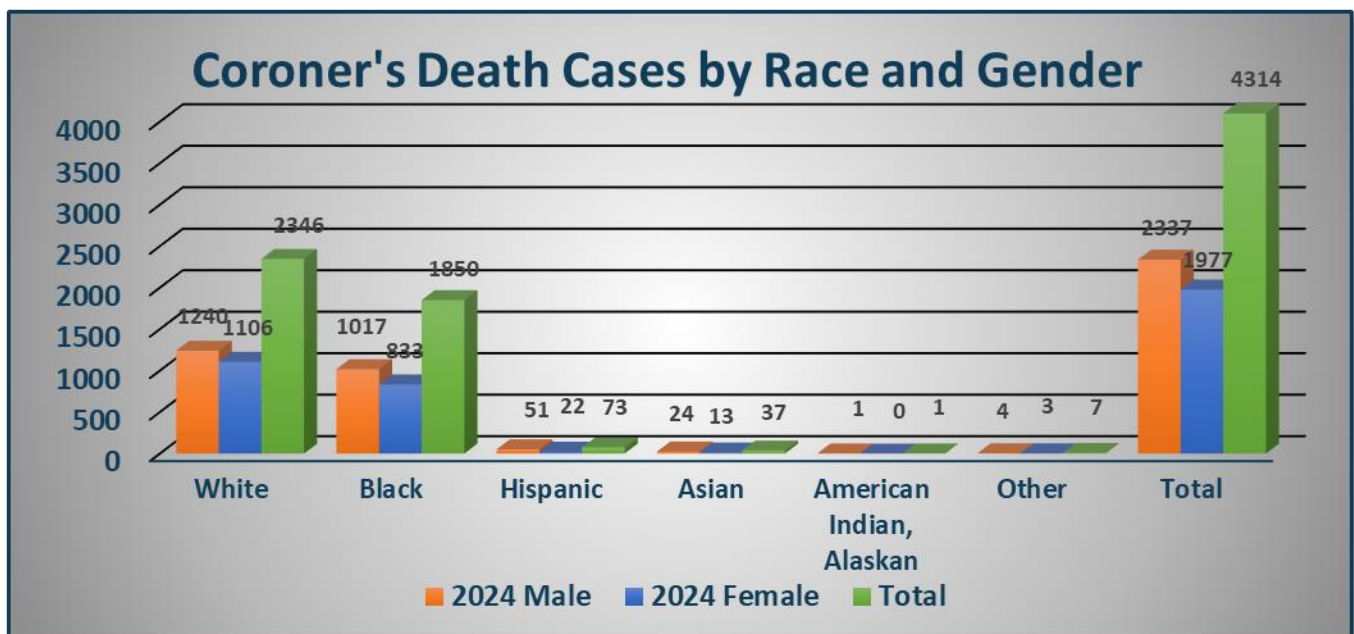
Type of Investigation	2022	2023	2024
<i>Number of Coroner's Death Cases</i>	4447	4045	4315
<i>Number of Death Certificates Signed</i>	3668	3223	3275
<i>Number of Bodies Transported</i>	464	363	359
<i>Number of Scene Responses</i>	1279	1070	1162
<i>Number of Toxicology Analysis Performed</i>	825	724	698
<i>Number of Histology Analysis Performed</i>	51	54	32
<i>Number of Cremation Permits Issued</i>	2071	1964	2191
<i>Number of Pauper Cremations Facilitated</i>	103	79	67
<i>Number of Unidentified Bodies</i>	1	1	1
<i>Number of East Baton Rouge Parish Autopsies</i>	260	218	233
<i>Number of Regional Autopsy Program Autopsies</i>	24	31	25
<i>Number of Exhumations</i>	0	0	0
<i>Number of Sexual Assault Forensic Exams</i>	381	308	385
<i>Total Referrals to LOPA</i>	428	613	853
<i>Total Organ and Tissue Donations</i>	89	79	91
<i>Total of Enhanced Lives from Organ/Tissue</i>	7500	3900	4845
<i>Total Cornea Donations</i>	37	30	31
<i>Continuing Tutorships</i>	14	19	10

### Graph 1: 2024 Coroner's Death Cases

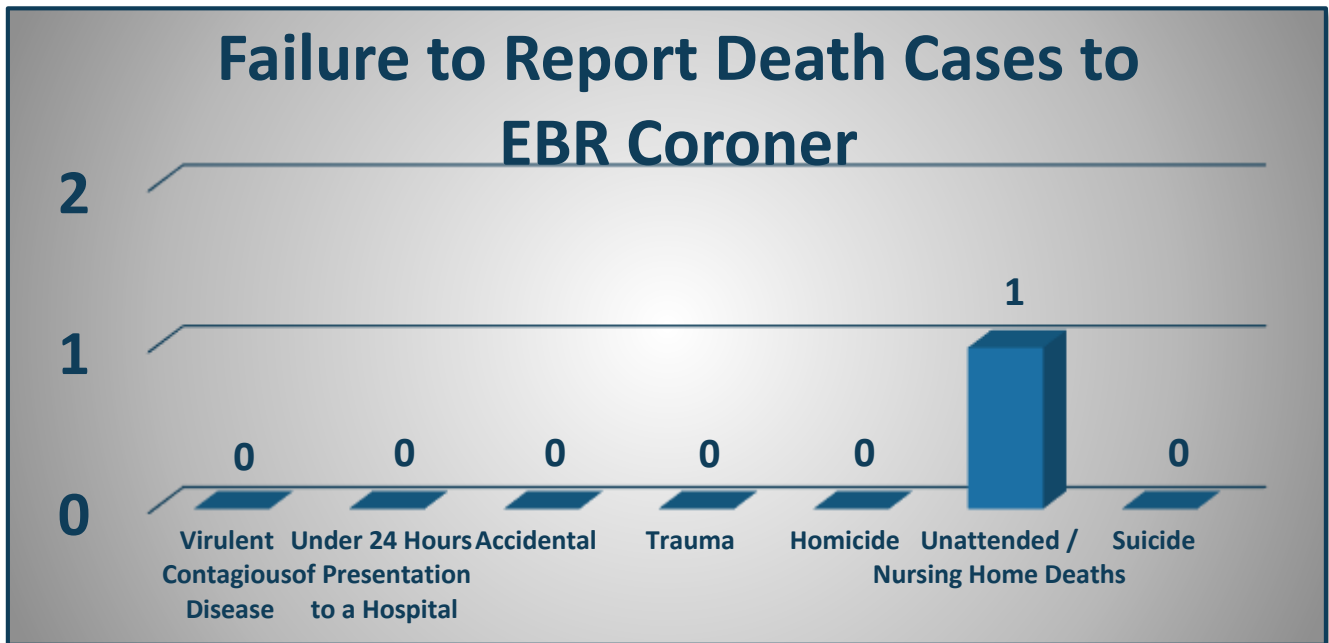
Compared to 2023 data, there were 106 less accidental deaths investigated in 2024. Homicides increased by 18 and Suicides increased by 5. Natural deaths increased by 631 and the number of undetermined cases increased by 3. Overall, the Coroner's Office investigated more deaths in 2024.



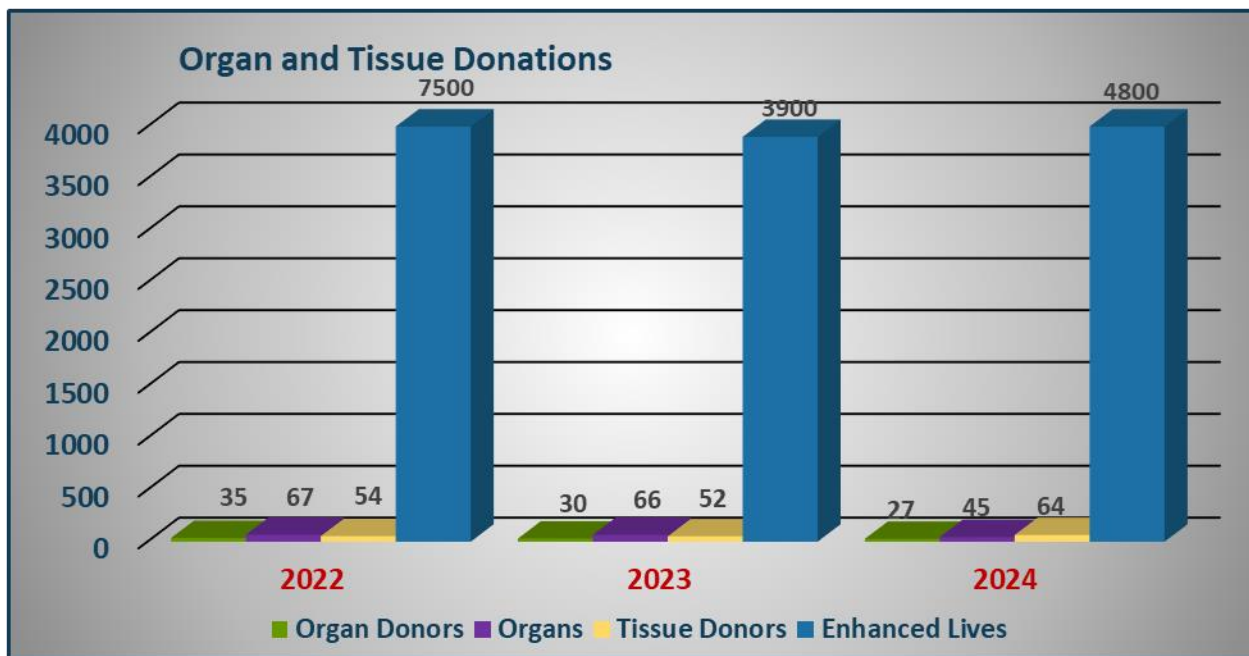
Graph 2: 2024 Coroner's Cases by Gender and Race



Graph 3: 2024 Failure to Report Coroner Death Cases



Graph 4: 2024 Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency Organ and Tissue Donations

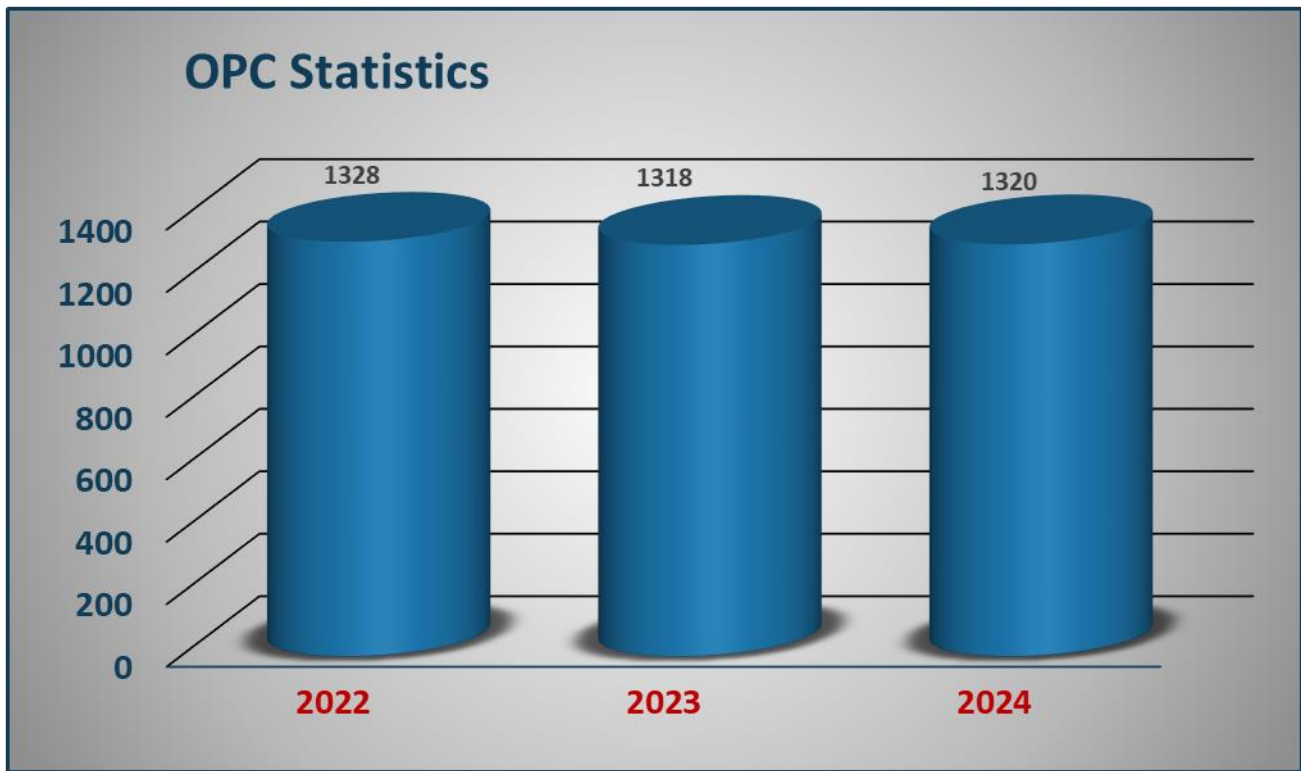


Graph 5: 2024 Baton Rouge Eye Bank Cornea Donations



# Mental Health

Graph 6: 2024 Order of Protective Custody (OPC)



Graph 7: 2024 Coroner Emergency Certificate (CEC)

