

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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June 2015

Get Smart Louisiana

Reforms Open Way for Smarter, Comprehensive Sentencing in the Future

SUPPORT US »

by Alex Mikulich, Ph.D.

JSRI Upcoming Events

June 23-28

Ms. Baudouin and Fr. Kammer will lead the Ministry of Management Program for Jesuits and their colleagues.

June 28

Ms. Baudouin will be honored with the [Adjutor Hominum Award](#), Loyola's highest alumni award.

JSRI Recent Activities

June 17

Fr. Kammer participated in the Mission Committee meeting of the Board of Christus Health.

June 12

Dr. Weishar participated in a demonstration to protest Louisiana's support of a lawsuit against President Obama's Executive Actions on immigration.

June 4

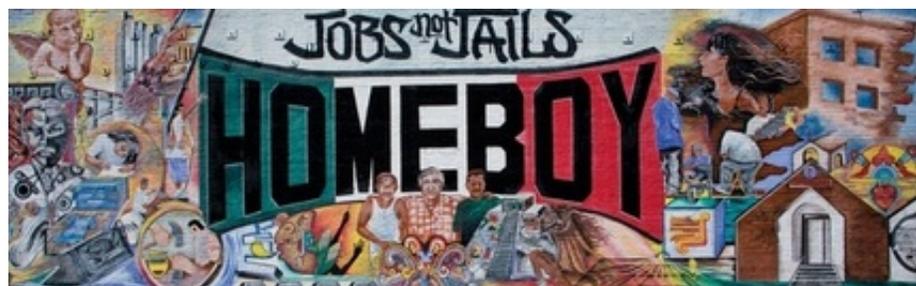
Ms. Baudouin and Dr. Weishar organized a tour of the family detention center in Dilley, Texas, for a group of advocates.

A collective sigh of relief emanated from the statehouse at 6:00 pm on June 11, 2015. The Louisiana legislature passed a last-minute budget-bill that appears to avoid fiscal disaster—at least for now. Legislators performed political acrobatics that enable the Governor to claim this budget is revenue neutral when in fact, and by necessity, businesses will pay more taxes.[1]

Yet there is reason to hope beyond all the legislative antics. Governor Jindal says he intends to sign a package of significant criminal justice reform bills that actually save money and make our state a better place.[2]

HCR 82, authored by Representative Walt Leger, creates the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force to develop sentencing and corrections policy recommendations. HCR 82 sets Louisiana on a path toward more comprehensive sentencing reform that reduces over-incarceration, saves money, and makes our state safer.

The legislature gave strong bi-partisan support to a bill easing penalties for marijuana possession. Originally authored by Senator J.B. Morell (SB241) and Representative Austin Badon (HB149) (both of New Orleans), this sentencing reform will save the state nearly \$17 million over five years according to the state's fiscal analyst.[3]



Jesuit scholastic Stephen Pitts began his internship working on economic justice projects.

May 29

Dr. Mikulich [interviewed](#) A. M. "Marty" Stroud III, the former Caddo Parish District Attorney who in 1984 wrongfully convicted Glenn Ford.

May 28

Dr. Weishar participated in the Heartland Delta VII Virtual Conference on *Balancing Our Economic Realities with Our Call to the Margins*.

May 21

Dr. Mikulich joined national faith leaders in a conversation about the proposed payday rule with CFPB Director Richard Cordray.

May 20

Alex Mikulich spoke about mass incarceration in Louisiana to Dominican University (Illinois) students at Café Dauphine.

May 19

Dr. Weishar joined a group of community stakeholders to discuss Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) actions in the New Orleans area with the Deputy Director of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas.

Instead of sentencing a first-time offender to eight years in prison at high cost to the state, HB 149 means that an individual caught with less than 14 grams of marijuana (less than half an ounce) would face up to 15 days in jail and up to six months if caught with less than 2.5 pounds. A second-offense conviction would drop from a felony to a misdemeanor with a sentence of no more than six months. If a second offense occurs more than two years after the first conviction, the violation will be treated as a first offense.

The Jesuit Social Research Institute joined the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops, the ACLU of Louisiana, and the Pelican Institute in supporting these criminal justice reforms. This broad coalition of groups and interests pushing criminal justice reform bodes well for future reform. The future will be even brighter if Louisiana elects a Governor this Fall who will champion comprehensive sentencing and criminal justice reforms.

Sheriffs and district attorneys defeated reform in the past. While their willingness to compromise and not block sentencing reductions this year is encouraging, they could stand in the way of future reform. Advocates will need to continue to press for more comprehensive policy change.

Louisiana is getting smart on crime. Now is the time to get even smarter and follow the lead of neighboring states like Texas and Mississippi that have enacted comprehensive sentencing legislation.[4]

[1] Stephanie Grace, "Businesses will pony-up more taxes, but Bobby Jindal saves political face, claims no tax hikes," The Baton Rouge Advocate, June 12, 2015 online at <http://theadvocate.com/news/12626682-123/stephanie-grace-quick-take-on>

[2] Kevin Litten, "Bobby Jindal says he'll sign pot penalties legislation." The Times-Picayune, online at http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/05/medical_marijuana_jindal_sign.html

[3] Louisiana Legislative Fiscal Office online at <https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=958424> [4] Alex Mikulich, "Smart Criminal Justice Reform: Texas and Mississippi Leading Gulf South States," *JustSouth Quarterly* (Fall 2014) online at http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/sites/loyno.edu.jsri/files/ISO%20Fall%202014%20Criminal%20Justice_1.pdf

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