



Community Coalition to Form around Improving Prison Conditions in East Baton Rouge Parish Prison

For Immediate Release:

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BATON ROUGE (January 26, 2018) – Last night, Voice of the Experienced (VOTE), the Promise of Justice Initiative and the Progressive Social Network of Baton Rouge co-hosted a community meeting for local residents to share their experiences in the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison and create a call to action to improve the conditions of the city's jail. With approximately fifty people in attendance, individuals shared the stories of either their own inhumane confinement, or stories of loved ones who tragically died while in the jail's custody.

- Lamar Johnson was a 27-year-old father of three small children with a loving girlfriend when he was arrested in 2015. He was living with his family in Baton Rouge when he was pulled over for having too dark of a tint on the taillight of his car. Due to an outstanding warrant for a non-violent charge that had happened four years prior in Jefferson Parish, he was booked into the jail, maced and physically assaulted by guards. He was thrown in solitary confinement even though he was in extreme emotional distress. Within four days of being booked, he hanged himself in his isolation cell, leaving his loving family.
 - At the meeting, his mother Linda described the prison's cold response to his passing: "They wouldn't allow my husband and my sons to come in, so I had to face this alone. And so I go to see him and he's on life support, handcuffed to the bed, with an armed guard at the foot of the bed. The disrespect of Lamar's life when all we wanted to know is what happened. They could have had a modicum of respect for us, to say "we're so sorry," to treat us humanely."
- Tennell Bell, a young law student who recently spent several days in the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, described her experience: "I spoke to another woman – she said she was schizophrenic and had meningitis, which is airborne, so I don't understand why she was in general population. She had open wounds on her knees down to the bone, and in the six days I was there I never saw her get any care... I don't understand how these things are still happening. But I guess if no one is speaking up, it's going to continue to happen."
- Frank Jarmon explained that since the parish prison opened, it has been an inhumane place: "I was the first juvenile in the parish prison in 1968. I was 15 years old. They only had three guards – if there was something going down, they weren't hearing and they weren't coming. There was a man who was sick, and I had to set the cell on fire just to get someone to come. These are the kind of things that went on there, go on there."
- Sade Dumas, from the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, relayed some of their successes in the Orleans community, urging the new group: "We need to be at those tables, we need to be part of the power that shifts the policy that affects us."
- Jacequelyn Germany seemed to speak for the room when she proclaimed "I don't care who you are, I don't care what you've done. You deserve dignity and respect."
- Paris LeBlanc, whose 72-year-old father died of neglect while being held on a \$300,000 bond for a misdemeanor, urged "In the end, justice does prevail. You just can't pitter out."

The Promise of Justice Initiative shared their report, [Punished Protestors: Conditions in East Baton Rouge Parish Prison](#). The report was published in July 2017, the one-year anniversary of the protests following the killing of Alton Sterling by Baton Rouge police officers. Its contents present a window into the disturbing conditions of the prison and the overly harsh, punitive treatment endured by people arrested and detained there following the protests. The investigation made clear that not only are the conditions of confinement in the jail inhumane—including denial of basic sanitation and medical care, physical violence, and disregard of due process—but that there is also a level of cruel intentionality to the treatment of detained citizens. In addition to basing the report on more than a dozen interviews of arrested protestors, the report relies on the [Health Management Associates' presentation](#) of their study on the medical practices at the jail. The Promise of Justice Initiative is currently working on a forthcoming report documenting the deaths that have occurred in the jail from 2012 to 2016. It is expected to be released this winter.

As a result of last night's meeting, a community coalition will form with a campaign to expose the deplorable conditions of the jail. There will be a call for reforms so that city officials can take the necessary steps to correct this gross violation of residents' rights. The coalition is scheduled to meet on Thursday, February 22, 2018 as part of VOTE's monthly member meeting.

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