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Loyola law students memorialize people who died in East Baton Rouge Parish Prison

Incarceration Transparency project's 'In Memoriam' series documents lives lost

New Orleans – Law students at Loyola University New Orleans have published a new series of [memorials](#) for individuals who died in East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, putting a human face on the lives lost behind bars.

The memorials are part of the [Incarceration Transparency project](#), which maintains the first publicly available statewide database that tracks deaths in Louisiana prisons, jails and youth detention facilities since 2015. The “In Memoriam” series attempts to provide a fuller picture of what families and communities lose when a person dies behind bars through research and interviews with their loved ones.

“A significant part of the work to improve transparency in prisons and jails is to acknowledge the humanity of those who die while incarcerated and are often overlooked or forgotten,” said [Loyola University New Orleans Distinguished Law Professor Andrea Armstrong](#), who launched the Incarceration Transparency project in 2019 and was [named a MacArthur Fellow](#) for her work in 2023. “Loyola law students help share their stories while also learning critical thinking, case investigation, compassionate interviewing and research advocacy skills.”

Students with Loyola’s Technology and Legal Innovation clinic, led by Professor Judson Mitchell, created the database and website in 2021. The first “In Memoriam” series spotlighted stories of individuals who died while incarcerated in the New Orleans Jail. This expansion of the series includes several more memorials of individuals from the jail as well as stories about 17 individuals who died in the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison.

Michael Cahoon, co-lead organizer and policy advocate for [The Promise of Justice Initiative](#), said the memorials and the Incarceration Transparency project give communities a critical tool to address severe issues in Louisiana’s jails and prisons.

“This project brings urgently needed transparency and humanity to a criminal legal system that too often lacks both,” he said. “Above all, it centers the humanity of incarcerated people and their families. We need this compassionate, people-first approach to achieve the deep, transformational changes Louisiana needs to promote public safety and address violence.”

Nishi Kumar, an attorney with the [Medical Justice Alliance](#) and an adjunct professor at Loyola University College of Law, added that the “In Memoriam” project is invaluable to the friends and families of those who die while incarcerated.

“As a civil rights attorney, I have worked with so many families who have lost loved ones behind bars, often in a traumatic manner, with no advance notice or the chance to say goodbye,” she said. “The In Memoriam project allowed those families to share their memories in a way that offered so many a sense of closure and the opportunity to begin healing.”

“These memorials are an important part of healing for me,” said Linda Franks, executive director of the [Fair Fight Initiative](#), whose son, Lamar Johnson, is memorialized as part of the project. “Since my son’s death, I have spoken of him in the context of how he left us, which is still not clear to us. This provides a record of how he lived and what he meant to his family.”

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