The Role of the Orleans Parish Sheriff

Every four years New Orleanians elect their sheriff. In Louisiana there are no limits to the amount of times an individual can be elected sheriff. **Sheriffs are charged with running the jail, facilitating evictions, sometimes collaborating with Immigration U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and more.** In 2020, the City of New Orleans approved a **$50 million budget for the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s Office** (OPSO).

The sheriff runs the jail

The Orleans Parish sheriff manages the Orleans Justice Center (OJC), formerly known as the Orleans Parish Prison (OPP), and is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of up to 1,250 people behind bars. In addition to being responsible for those imprisoned, many of whom are awaiting trial and have not been convicted of a crime, the sheriff also manages employees, contractors, and vendors—including medical professionals, commissary providers, and more.

In 2013, OPP, later named the OJC, was placed under a [federal consent decree](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-consent-deed-in-housing-case) due to inhumane and [dangerous jail conditions](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-consent-deed-in-housing-case). The consent decree required officials to improve conditions at the jail so that it met federal safety requirements. Last year, despite continued complaints about safety, a federal judge ruled that day-to-day control of the jail should be handed back to the current Sheriff Marlin Gusman, who has served in the office since 2004.

The sheriff is also responsible for:

- Providing for the physical and mental wellbeing of all those incarcerated by working in partnership with a third-party healthcare provider. OPSO currently contracts with Wellpath, who is currently involved in pending malpractice lawsuits, to provide physical and mental healthcare
- The hiring and management of OPSO employees
- Setting visitation rules inside OJC
- Contracting with outside providers for telephone services and commissary needs

The sheriff facilitates evictions

The OPSO executes evictions. Furthermore, OPSO’s civil division [serves as the auctioneer](https://www.neworleanslawyers.com/medical-malpractice) for civil court ordered sales and uses a portion of fees collected for the overall OPSO budget.
Possibilities: The 2021 New Orleans Sheriff Platform

Ahead of the October 9, 2021 sheriff election, directly impacted New Orleanians, community organizations, healthcare service providers, and criminal justice reform advocates came together to envision what it would look like to have a sheriff that centered the community they served, provided adequate care, improved jail conditions, and actively worked to combat mass incarceration.

The envisioning process made one thing clear: New Orleanians deserve a sheriff that provides for their neighbors, family, and friends with care!

As we move closer to the upcoming sheriff election, it is up to us, the voters and residents of New Orleans, to ensure that our sheriff upholds our values. If you are interested in learning more about how you can be part of ensuring OPSO is aligned with our values and provides for the needs of the community; read more about The 2021 New Orleans Sheriff Platform HERE and, and add your signature to the platform HERE.

About the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition

The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition is a diverse, grassroots coalition of individuals and organizations from across New Orleans who have come together to shrink the size of the jail and improve the conditions of confinement for those held in detention in Orleans Parish. Founded in 2004, OPPRC members include community activists, lawyers, service providers, organizers, formerly incarcerated people, and their family members. Visit opprcnola.org to learn more.