
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Happy Mardi Gras, Y'all!

It's really great to be back in Louisiana after all the years I lived away. I love Louisiana traditions, and I particularly love Mardi Gras. People in Louisiana are known for being friendly, and for needing little excuse for having a party. Mardi Gras is just about the biggest party ever. I hope each of you has a safe and festive time and enjoys the holiday. One thing I am not going to do is rush to work this holiday like I did on our last holiday – I don't want to break the other arm!

Another thing we love in Louisiana is our food. We have not only the best culinary tradition, we also have the best chef. Congratulations to Chef Ron Sonnier, who was recently recognized as "Chef of the Year" for the second year in a row by the Baton Rouge Chapter of the American Culinary Federation. Chef Sonnier teaches culinary arts at Bridge City, and taught for several years at Jetson. Chef Sonnier said he meets the mission by providing skills training and mentoring people starting out in the profession. The chapter – like Chef Sonnier - is very involved in culinary education and encouragement for people wanting to enter the culinary profession. If you have ever had the privilege of watching Chef Sonnier work with our youth, you would know that his passions are preparing beautiful food, and teaching young people to prepare it. We are so lucky to have Chef Ron Sonnier as a part of our OJJ family.

JJIC met today and we heard some wonderful news. Commissioner of Administration Angele Davis, who is also a member of JJIC, announced that Governor Jindal has committed to put funds for a new, regional therapeutic secure facility in the Acadiana area in this year's capital outlay bill. Regionalization has long been a part of our strategic plan, and, thanks to the Governor's vision, we can begin to move forward with this vital component of juvenile justice reform.

We presented to JJIC some of the legislative issues we want to pursue during the upcoming session. We need to clarify language regarding closure of Jetson and opening the new facility, Capital Area Center for Youth, on that property. We also need to look at the law that states that OJJ must take youth into custody within 14 days of commitment. That law conflicts with the need for 30 days in which to do a valid evaluation of youth using the SAVRY assessment tool. We will ask the legislature to change the number to 30 days rather than 14, so that our use of a valid and reliable instrument will not be compromised.

We would like to see legislation that creates a Youth Bill of Rights. We will work together with stakeholders and advocate groups on this forward thinking idea. Having a Youth Bill of Rights will put Louisiana at the very forefront among states in sending a clear, positive message about our reform efforts. No other state has such legislation. We strongly feel that adoption of a Youth Bill of Rights sends the message that it's truly a new day for juvenile justice in Louisiana. Not only do we plan to carry out our mission, and always do the right thing for our kids, but the things that are right for kids will be out there for all to see.

It's been a good week for OJJ and I hope that each of you has had a good week as well. As always, thanks for everything you do, every day, to carry out our mission, and do the right thing for our kids.

Sincerely,

"Doc"

Dr. Mary Livers

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