

# BEYOND POLICING: HOW BATON ROUGE BECOMES A SAFER CITY

**MAYOR- PRESIDENT SHARON WESTON BROOME  
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In 2020, driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, America saw a 30% increase in murder rates, with an additional 7% increase in 2021. Baton Rouge mirrored (and surpassed) this national trend. There were 83 people murdered in East Baton Rouge Parish in 2019, 136 people in 2020 (a 63.9% increase from 2019), and 170 people in 2021 (a 25% increase from 2020). This is an obvious crisis in public safety, and we must take immediate action to reverse this alarming trend and work intentionally to restore trust between neighbors and between residents and local government institutions.

Even before the crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, Baton Rouge was grappling with significant public safety challenges. In the past ten years, one of the most pivotal seasons in Baton Rouge was the summer of 2016. It represented the boiling over of numerous systemic issues that have long simmered around us. That summer, both citizen and law enforcement lives were lost. Clashes between

the public and the police were exacerbated by outsiders who cared more about politics than the real people in our parish. Catastrophic flooding multiplied our collective trauma. Although the natural disaster prompted a great coming-together of neighbors, as it always does in Louisiana, the unity was oriented around short-term survival more than long-term healing.

A safe Baton Rouge is a community where everyone has the opportunity to prosper and where basic needs are met, including healthcare, mental health, childcare, nutritious food, affordable housing, early childhood education, job training, etc. It looks like a Baton Rouge where kids have after school programs that didn't limit you to sports. A Baton Rouge where your corner store owner knows your mother and father by name. A Baton Rouge where parades and college football homecomings are a safe haven and not a place of fear. A Baton Rouge where you don't have to move to the outskirts to feel like you escaped some of the violence.

But, how do we achieve this? It starts by being bold in our community engagement and real about our issues. Many of the actions we have taken over the past several years have addressed infrastructure and institutional issues that are foundational to having a safe city where everyone can prosper but none of it works without community partnership. This is especially true when it comes to policing. It has

been shown time and time again that we cannot arrest our way out of the issues facing our nation or our city. The public must be engaged in public safety, and individuals must take ownership in their families and communities to make them safer.

But that's not all. An important key to achieving a safe Baton Rouge is addressing generational trauma, which is an underlying cause of violence. When the adults around them grapple with untreated substance abuse and mental health issues, and when violence escalates in our neighborhoods, children absorb trauma and carry it into adolescence and beyond. These young people go on to repeat the cycles of violence that they themselves have been harmed by, which pulls the next generation into the cycle. In lieu of over-policing, we must bring trauma informed therapy to bear on this cycle and citizens must work together to provide positive outlets for children and young adults to develop their talents and reach their potential. As these cycles are broken, we have to create opportunities for building generational wealth, replacing a pattern of grief and despair with one of hope and prosperity.

In the next ten years, we must develop people and programs into an ecosystem that emphasizes the tearing down of silos and the growth of collaboration across individuals,

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organizations, and institutions. The Mayor's Office is only one part of this ecosystem, which also includes the District Attorney's Office, the Baton Rouge Police Department, the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office, local nonprofit and

neighborhood organizations, philanthropic organizations, education institutions, and numerous other entities and leaders. This collaboration has already begun with the Summer of Hope Initiative in 2022 that included 8 weeks of community events in neighborhoods that have seen some of the highest rates of violence. We focused on restoring joy and hope while also having honest conversations about violence and connecting people with resources to meet basic needs. I believe this is only the beginning of the next decade of life in our city. We can take what we have learned in the past ten years and move forward in the right direction in the next ten years, but we can only do this if we prioritize long-term healing that leads to a true sense of trust and unity so that, wherever we go, we go together.

#### *About the Authors*

##### **Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome**

Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome is the Chief Executive Officer of the city and parish.



Sharon Weston Broome was sworn in as the Mayor-President of the City of Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish on January 2, 2017. She is the first woman to be elected as the leader of the capital city of Louisiana. Since the campaign trail, her focus has been to unite the citizenry around the common goals of equality in education, economic development, justice, housing and other quality ways of life.

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Sam Washington, the owner of, It's Your Choice, LLC, a company all about training individuals, companies, schools, etc. on resilience and transitional thinking. I offer several services revolving around resilience, leadership, team building, success habits, etc.

