THE LENS
FOCUSED ON NEW ORLEANS AND THE GULF COAST

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Recent death at New Orleans jail being treated as a suicide, officials say

by **NICK CHRASTIL**
AUGUST 31, 2020

The Orleans Justice Center. (Michael Isaac Stein/The Lens)

The cause of death of Robert Rettman, a 46-year-old man who died in custody this month at the New Orleans jail, was determined to be “asphyxia due to hanging,” according to the Orleans Parish Coroner’s Office.

Blake Arcuri, a lawyer for the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s Office, said the office was treating Rettman’s death as a suicide, though Jason Melancon, a spokesperson for Orleans Parish Coroner Dwight McKenna, said the manner of death was still under investigation.

Aside from confirming that Rettman’s death was being treated as a suicide — which was not mentioned in the initial release announcing his death — OPSO officials declined to respond to multiple questions from The Lens regarding the circumstances of Rettman’s death. Citing an ongoing investigation, officials declined to comment on whether he was being treated for mental illness, on detox protocol, or whether or not deputies were regularly supervising the housing tier where he was being held.

An online database of 911 calls for service says the incident that led to Rettman’s arrest was an alleged armed robbery with a knife in the 3400 block of St. Charles Avenue. That charge was later reduced to attempted armed robbery. A spokesperson for the police department did not immediately respond to a request for details regarding the incident.

But Rettman was also booked for possession of Suboxone — a prescription drug used to treat opioid addiction. Possession of Suboxone — which contains Buprenorphine, a schedule III controlled dangerous substance under Louisiana law — is illegal without a prescription in the state.

It is unclear if Rettman was being treated for opioid withdrawal at the time of his death, which came just two days after he was booked into the jail.

Rettman’s death was the third death of someone in custody at the New Orleans jail this year, raising questions among people who watch the jail closely about supervision and conditions at the facility. The jail has been under federal court supervision since 2013 — as part of a federal consent decree meant to bring conditions inside into compliance with the U.S. Constitution.

And it comes as Orleans Parish Sheriff Marlin Gusman prepares to **resume control** of the jail from an appointed compliance director, Darnley Hodge.

The apparent suicide also arrives as an ongoing controversy and legal battle over whether or not to build a special mental health unit of the jail, **known as Phase III**, comes to a head in federal court. Whether the current jail has — or could be renovated to have — necessary facilities to manage suicidal detainees is one of the issues being debated.

The other two deaths at the jail this year occured in June. On June 18, 27-year-old Desmond Guild collapsed in the dayroom of his housing tier, and was later pronounced dead at the hospital. Then, just a week later, 35-year-old Christian Freeman similarly collapsed on his housing tier due to an "apparent medical issue." He was taken to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The cause and manner of death for both Guild and Freeman have not been released by the coroner, but during an autopsy it was revealed that Freeman was **positive for COVID-19** — despite his death coming just a week after OPSO announced that they believed the virus to be wiped out in the facility. Neither Guild nor Rettman were positive for the virus.

Initial reports from the coroner's office also noted that Guild had pulmonary thromboembolus — a blood clot in an artery in the lungs — and Freeman had hypertensive cardiovascular disease. Neither showed evidence of significant trauma.

The three deaths make 2020 already the most deadly year at the jail since 2017, when there were four. In 2018 two people died at the jail, and last year none did.

Sade Dumas, executive director of the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, said the recent deaths of Guild, Freeman, and now Rettman signified "appalling jail conditions and staff negligence."

"As the death toll climbs, the sheriff must focus on adequate personnel training to provide care for those in his custody," Dumas said in a statement. "With proper supervision, Robert's death by apparent suicide could have been avoided."

Death occurred two days after arrest

Robert Rettman was booked into the New Orleans jail on Aug. 16, and according to the initial information released by the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office, he was found unresponsive in his cell on the morning of Aug. 18.

An initial court hearing in Rettman's case took place on Aug. 17, but Rettman was not present for it. Due to the coronavirus, first appearances take place via videoconference, meaning Rettman would have made his appearance from a designated area within the jail, rather than at court. According to court records, Rettman "refused being transported" to the virtual hearing. It is unclear why.

The next day, the morning of Rettman's death, OPSO officials say that a deputy "had spoken with Rettman earlier about his request for a shower and information about his court date." The same deputy then found him unresponsive in his cell at 10:16 AM. Rettman was then transported to University Medical Center and pronounced dead at 11:05 AM.

It is unclear when exactly the deputy initially talked to Rettman, or how much time had passed since the conversation and when Rettman was found unresponsive.

According to supervision procedures outlined in the federal consent decree, deputies are required to make rounds of general housing tiers every 30 minutes, and 15 minutes for special population tiers.

But in the **most recent report** issued by federally appointed monitors in July, however, **notes** that the supervision rounds were "not consistently conducted as per OPSO policy."

"OPSO has significantly improved in the conducting and documenting of security rounds (30 minutes or 15 minutes depending on the unit)," the report said. "However, review of records, observations, and investigations clearly indicates that rounds and direct supervision surveillance are still not consistently conducted as per OPSO policy."

The monitors wrote that "direct supervision requires surveillance of all of the inmates and cannot be properly performed by sitting behind a desk or in the control module" and that it "requires walking around the unit, looking into the individual cells, and actively engaging with the inmates."

"During the tour, units were noted to be unstaffed, including mandatory posts," the monitors wrote. "If staff are not present, it impossible to make the required rounds"

As with supervision, the detoxification protocol at the facility for detainees going through withdrawal has gotten better since the monitors' first report in 2014. In **one early report**, the

monitoring team noted that according to the Health Services Administrator there had been "no training of custody or health care staff on detoxification and withdrawal" and that there were "no training records and no oversight."

But while the most recent report from the court monitors notes significant improvements, it also specifically points out that "there are still lags" to administering detainees going through withdrawal with their "first dose of vital medication."

Ongoing legal wrangling over mental health care in consent decree case

Earlier this month, following a generally positive report from the federal court monitors, U.S. District Judge Lance Africk gave the OK for Sheriff Gusman to **retake control of the jail** from appointed compliance director Darnley Hodge, who has been in charge since 2018.

Hodge is still in charge of day-to-day operations at the jail, according to Phil Stelly, a spokesperson for OPSO. Stelly said that no date had been set for when Sheriff Gusman would take over.

In court filings arguing that he should once again be in charge of the jail, Gusman has blasted the federal monitors for holding the jail to **unreasonable standards** and for attempting to create what he described as a "jail utopia." (Gusman also argued that the consent decree should be lifted altogether, but the federal judge dismissed that claim, and said Gusman could bring it up at a later time.)

Meanwhile, a hearing is set in October to determine whether or not the City of New Orleans can halt plans to build a new jail building, known as Phase III, primarily intended to house detainees with acute mental illness — some of who are being held at Elayn Hunt Correctional facility, a state prison in St. Gabriel.

The city has argued that it doesn't have the money for the new facility, and that it is unnecessary given the improved medical and mental health care at the jail and the decreasing jail population.

But the other parties in the lawsuit **have opposed the city's request** to halt work on the facility. Attorneys representing inmates at the jail argued that the current jail contains "structural deficiencies" that " include the inability to safely house prisoners with acute and

sub-acute mental illness, tier mezzanine levels which allow prisoners with mental illness to engage in self-harm, a lack of an adequate number of suicide-resistant cells, and a lack of programming space for individual and group therapy."

More recently, the city suggested that the current jail could be renovated to accommodate those inmates returning from Hunt, or that the Temporary Detention Center — another facility on the jail campus — could be converted into a permanent facility. Renovations of TDC for the Hunt inmates are nearly complete, but were meant only as a temporary solution until Phase III is completed.

The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition has come out in favor of a retrofit of the current jail building, which will not add any additional jail beds or outside infrastructure, and have advocated for more robust mental health care outside of the jail.

In a letter to Africk, they argued that the retrofit option would allow the city to use leftover funds to "build a community wellness center to care for people with serious mental illness outside of the carceral system."

In response to Robert Rettman's death, Dumas of OPPRC, said that the "community will continue to demand transparency and accountability to protect those still trapped inside."

NICK CHRASTIL

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MAGAZINE

THE FIFTY

She Wants to Fix One of Louisiana's Deadliest Jails. She Needs to Beat the Sheriff First.

An upcoming election between a progressive activist and a longtime incumbent will test whether reformers can crack the traditionally tough-on-crime office of the sheriff.

Photos by Bryan Tarnowski for Politico Magazine

By JESSICA PISHKO
11/10/2021 04:30 AM EST

Jessica Pishko is a writer and a lawyer who is working on a book about sheriffs.

For a stretch of time last year, the deaths seemed to keep coming in the Orleans Justice Center, New Orleans' jail. In August, 46-year old Robert Rettman died from what the coroner's office called "asphyxia due to hanging." Before Rettman, there were 35-year-old Christian Freeman and 27-year-old Desmond Guild, both of whom collapsed suddenly in their cells, were rushed to the hospital and died. Freeman had fentanyl and a veterinary-grade sedative in his system; he also tested positive for Covid-19. Guild appears to have died from a blood clot.

These men are not alone. This month, Incarceration Transparency, a project out of the Loyola University New Orleans law school, released a database documenting 15 deaths at the Orleans Justice Center between 2014 and 2019. Only two other Louisiana jail facilities, both of which have larger incarcerated populations, had higher death counts. Almost all the Orleans Justice Center's inmates are pre-trial, and many are jailed for nonviolent charges. "The fact is, so many people go in for traffic tickets, and don't come out," says Ursula Price, a longtime criminal justice reformer now serving as executive director of the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice.

These deaths add to long-standing concerns about the safety of the approximately 900 people housed in the Orleans Justice Center (once called the Orleans Parish Prison), which falls under the control of New Orleans Sheriff Marlin Gusman. Gusman, who has held his seat since 2004, has long faced criticism from prison reform advocates, starting with his oversight of the facility during Hurricane Katrina. In 2008, the jail ranked among the deadliest in the nation. The next year, the Justice Department issued a report on what it said were unconstitutional and dangerous conditions inside the jail. In 2012, Gusman was sued, and the jail was placed under a consent decree, subjecting it to federal monitoring until it can bring confinement conditions up to legal standards.

The Orleans Parish jail, above, has been under a federal consent decree since 2013, following a lawsuit alleging abuse and unconstitutional conditions.

Through it all, Gusman kept getting reelected, largely with support from New Orleans' political establishment. Now, though, for the first time since 2014, he has a serious electoral challenger: progressive candidate Susan Hutson, who hopes to oust Gusman in the election this coming weekend with support from criminal justice reform groups around the city.

An attorney with a background in activism, Hutson served for more than a decade as the independent monitor for the New Orleans Police Department, which has been under its own consent decree since 2012. In that capacity, she pushed to reform a department long accused of misconduct in its policing, and the department saw modest improvements. As sheriff, Hutson wants to bring the jail into compliance with its consent decree and ultimately decrease the jail's population. Taking a cue from the calls for reform that emerged after the death of George Floyd, she also hopes to work with local groups to push city leaders to invest more resources in the community and scale back the footprint of the police force.

The top two candidates after Saturday's nonpartisan primary will advance to a December election if no one receives more than 50 percent of ballots cast; there are three other candidates in the race, but none are expected to garner a significant share of the votes, setting up a battle between Gusman and Hutson.

Sheriff Marlin Gusman, speaking outside a new jail facility in New Orleans in 2015, has held his seat since 2004 and is seeking reelection. | Gerald Herbert/AP Photo

Beyond the stakes for New Orleans, the election represents one of the first big national tests of whether the criminal justice movement can make an impact on sheriff's offices, which so far have remained largely impervious to reform, even

present a uniquely challenging office to overhaul, particularly at a time when federal police reform efforts have failed, reform-minded prosecutors are facing recall elections and crime rates are ticking upward. The job of the sheriff has always had a strong tough-on-crime culture, and to date few progressive candidates have been willing to take on the challenge of reforming a system that touches everything from immigration to policing to jails. Because most sheriffs are elected at the county level, they also must appeal to a wide swath of voters, while left-leaning mayors in big cities can appoint their police chiefs and interview candidates from across the country.

Gusman argues he is the realist in the race — the only person who really understands how the Orleans Justice Center operates and can fulfill the requirements of, and ultimately end, the consent decree; he also wants to expand the jail so it can offer more mental health services. As for last year's deaths, a representative for Gusman told me investigations into each had been completed and that staffing was not a factor. A campaign spokesperson added that Rettman was on a "detox protocol" for drugs and alcohol, but that he "reported no suicidal or self-harmful thoughts during his medical screenings." The sheriff declined to make any further comment about death investigations at the Orleans Justice Center.

Susan Hutson, who spent more than a decade as the independent monitor for the New Orleans Police Department, is running for sheriff as a progressive reformer.

Gusman has deep ties to New Orleans' Democratic establishment, having served as chief administrative officer for then-Mayor Marc Morial and on the city council for four years. Hutson also is a Democrat, like almost two-thirds of voters in New Orleans. Unlike almost every other sheriff candidate in the nation, though, she has never worked in law enforcement, which she believes positions her well in a city where activists have long called for racial justice in the criminal system. (Hutson is Black, as is Gusman.) "I'm not looking at it from [a cop's] perspective at all," she says. "I believe that this system — this system has got to be fundamentally changed."

The election will be the first indication of whether that's possible.

For the past decade, criminal justice reformers have taken to the ballot box to elect progressive-minded prosecutors and judges who vow to reduce penalties — or dismiss charges altogether — for low-level crimes, avoid excessive sentences and right the injustices of the past by reviewing questionable cases. More than two dozen progressive-minded prosecutors have managed to win elections in that time, including Kim Foxx in Cook County, Illinois (home to Chicago); Rachael Rollins in Boston; Larry Krasner in Philadelphia; and Chesa Boudin in San Francisco. Although these prosecutors have faced challenges once in office, their elections alone signaled a change.

Because sheriffs, like prosecutors, are elected officials, advocacy groups have been inspired to attempt a similar strategy to elect progressive sheriffs. But the results have been mixed at best, especially when it comes to reforming jails.

There have been recent successes, many related to immigration reforms. In 2016, after decades of organizing, Latino activists in Maricopa County, Arizona, ousted Joe Arpaio, the county's fiercely anti-immigrant sheriff. (Liberal megadonor George Soros contributed $2 million to the effort, which probably helped.) In 2018, North Carolina voters elected a slate of reform-minded sheriffs in Mecklenburg, Durham and Wake counties, each of whom agreed to withdraw from a federal program that enables sheriffs to assist Immigration and Customs Enforcement in deporting jail inmates. And in 2020, Cobb County, Georgia, and Charleston County, South Carolina, both elected sheriffs who ran on reform platforms. Still, none of these candidates explicitly argued for downsizing their budgets or their jail populations — a core goal of many criminal justice reformers.

“I think there is a movement across the country of people who are fighting for something different,” says Max Rose, executive director of Sheriffs for Trusting Communities, a nonprofit that supports grassroots organizers in sheriff’s campaigns. “Elections are an important and limited tool in that fight.”

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Almost all these new sheriffs are Black (Kristin Graziano, the new sheriff in Charleston County, is white and an out lesbian), which is significant because sheriffs have historically been predominately white and male, while the populations most affected by sheriffs’ work are disproportionately Black and Latino. A 2020 report by the Reflective Democracy Campaign found that 90

percent of the nation's sheriffs are white men, while fewer than 3 percent are women.

There are signs that this pattern is changing. In Fort Bend County, Texas, a suburb of Houston, voters in 2020 elected the first Black sheriff since Reconstruction. In the recent sheriff's election in Erie County, New York, Kimberly Beaty, a former deputy commissioner of the Buffalo Police Department, ran against Republican John Garcia. Beaty would be the first Black woman to hold that office; the election has come down to absentee ballots, which are still being counted. If elected, Hutson would be the first woman to serve as New Orleans sheriff, and the first Black woman.

Still, the barriers to electing progressive sheriffs remain high. Most sheriffs hold office for multiple terms, stretching to decades, often because of a mix of institutional entropy and a lack of public awareness about the office. Michael Zoorob, a postdoctoral researcher at Northeastern University, found in an analysis that sheriffs have an incumbency advantage that "far exceeds that of other local offices" such as city councilor, state representative or mayor. Much of this advantage, Zoorob wrote, comes from a sheriff's nearly unchecked discretion, which can include the ability to hire and fire employees at will, award contracts, initiate investigations and block oversight. Plus, sheriff's elections, as compared with other city races, tend to hinge on more suburban and rural voters who are more likely to lean conservative on criminal justice issues.

The sheriff's race in New Orleans would be another milestone for criminal justice reform. Hutson sees herself as part of the broader movement to change the office of the sheriff; she says she is inspired by women like Graziano who have been elected on reform platforms, and she likes to talk about "Black girl magic." But she also recognizes that, even if she wins, she will have a lot of work to do to overcome the history of abuses in the New Orleans

jail.

Louisiana has a long history of high incarceration rates and heavy-handed sheriffs. In 19th century, the state's sheriffs assisted in a practice known as convict leasing — the renting out of incarcerated people's labor. Today, sheriffs can operate work-release programs, in which they keep the bulk of the incarcerated worker's wages, and they can incarcerate people on behalf of state and federal agencies, for which they receive per diem pay from the government. The state also gives wide latitude to sheriffs to hire deputies and run their jails, including contracting with private health care providers. And the state sheriffs' association holds significant political power, often lobbying to block criminal justice reforms. "Why would I want to be governor when I can be king?" one Louisiana sheriff once asked. (He is memorialized in a 14-foot statue in Metairie.)

Gusman, pictured in 2013, argues that the Orleans Parish jail overall is heeding the demands of its federal monitor, and he supports a $50 million project to add 89 new beds to the facility for mental health services. | Gerald Herbert/AP Photo

New Orleans has long struggled with accountability in its justice system. In the 2012 suit against Gusman, a group of people housed in the Orleans Justice Center alleged horrific conditions: “Rapes, sexual assaults, and beatings are common place throughout the facility. Violence regularly occurs at the hands of sheriffs’ deputies, as well as other prisoners. The facility is full of homemade knives, or ‘shanks.’ People living with serious mental illnesses languish without treatment, left vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse,” the lawsuit read. Gusman challenged the lawsuit, and said the city wasn’t adequately funding the jail. After the federal government joined the suit, DOJ sought its consent decree, which was approved by a judge in 2013. In his ruling, the judge found that the conditions at the jail had become “an indelible stain on the community.” Since then, the jail has been under a federal monitor who

oversees the jail's mandated efforts to protect individuals from physical and sexual assault, provide adequate medical and mental health care, prevent suicides, and ensure adequate sanitation.

Gusman has bristled under the oversight. Last year, he argued in a motion to end the consent decree that he has done all he can to bring the jail up to snuff. And he has described the facility as "one of the most modern and functional" in the nation. But the federal monitors' latest report, issued this past February after the deaths of Rettman, Freeman and Guild, castigated Gusman for inadequate medical care, excessive deputy turnover and persistent violence, in addition citing "extremely problematic" suicide prevention measures. The monitors also raised concerns that Gusman's administration had not "adopt[ed] a culture where accountability is embraced as opposed to a culture where there is a reluctance to address the deficiencies and, in some instances, undermine the efforts of those whose job it is to provide information."

Through a representative, Gusman said by email that most of the backsliding identified by the monitors was related to Covid-19 and a need for a new jail facility, and that the jail overall was heeding the monitor's demands. "[W]e have full or substantial compliance on 167 of the 174 items in the monitor report. We are light years ahead of where we began," the sheriff added.

Local journalism and watchdog groups have drawn attention to a host of other problems at the jail, and while many criminal justice reformers I spoke with supported Gusman in 2004, some have since soured on him. The latest battlefield is a proposed expansion of the New Orleans jail, called Phase III, which would add at least 89 new beds for mental health services, at a cost of $50 million. (Previous phases included the post-Katrina construction of the current Orleans Justice Center facility, which opened in 2015.) The city of New Orleans, including the mayor and the district attorney, oppose Phase III construction, as do community groups. Hutson has joined them, arguing that the current jail building can be retrofitted for mental health needs. She says she would rather see more mental health resources in the community (which a

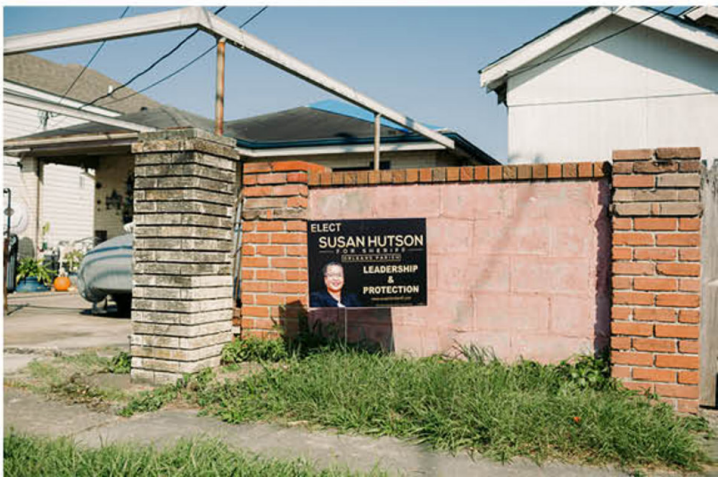
sheriff can support politically but not actually control). Gusman supports the new construction, as do the federal monitors. “I need the appropriate facility to be able to safely provide these individuals with treatment to stabilize and hopefully improve their conditions prior to the courts ordering their return to the community,” Gusman told me by email.

Ahead of the election, Hutson has been on the road, trying to make sure voters know her name and talking up her reform agenda, which includes reducing the jail population.

Norris Henderson, founder and executive director of VOTE, a grassroots organization run by formerly incarcerated people advocating for criminal justice reform, has worked with Gusman before. But he told me bluntly: “When you can’t protect people inside of a jail, when you can’t provide the quality of care inside of the jail, it’s time to move on.”

In her campaign, Hutson is drawing on her activist background to highlight how she would approach the job differently. Before she was born, her grandfather was shot and killed by a sheriff's deputy in East Texas, an incident she says inspired her to fight racism in the criminal justice system. As a college student at the University of Pennsylvania, she protested South African apartheid and agitated for change after the 1985 MOVE bombing, when the Philadelphia police bombed a Black neighborhood, killing 11 people. After law school, she worked as a prosecutor and police overseer in Austin, Texas, and Los Angeles before landing in New Orleans.

As the independent police monitor, a position created by the city to oversee the police department, Hutson made advisory opinions, including reviewing use-of-force incidents, complaints and disciplinary procedures, as well as helping the department improve community relations. But she did not have the ability to implement reform herself. "You use your bully pulpit, but you're not the actual decision-maker," she explains. Still, serious use-of-force incidents in the New Orleans police went from 13 in 2013 to one in 2018, and, in polls, residents have cited more positive attitudes toward the police. (The New Orleans Police Department declined to comment on Hutson or "any candidates for public office.") Before she stepped down to run for sheriff, Huston was president of the National Association for Citizen Oversight of Law Enforcement and was cited around the country for her expertise on police oversight.

Hutson takes seriously grassroots demands for decarceration. “I want to be a part of changing the system to be closer to the point where we may not need [jails] anymore,” she says.

Ahead of the election, Hutson has been campaigning around the city, trying to make sure voters know her name and talking up her commitment to what she calls the “three c’s” of correction: care, custody and control. Her platform is ambitious. She wants to end the jail’s contract with Wellpath, the private company that provides health care to people inside the Justice Center, replacing it with health professionals the sheriff’s office can hire and control. She also wants to avoid increasing the jail population; encourage people inside the jail to vote and engage in rehabilitative programs; and, in her words, “comply with the consent decree and implement strict financial controls” over the jail’s budget and expenditures.

Most important, she says, is to “listen to what our community is saying.” For Hutson, that means taking seriously grassroots demands for decarceration and working with the city to try to shift funding to community care, which is not something a sheriff would typically do. “I want to be a part of changing the system to be closer to the point where we may not need [jails] anymore,” she says. “Is it going to happen in my lifetime? I don't know. But I definitely want to do my part.”

Gusman has argued that he has his own progressive credentials, pointing to a high school for teens that he opened at the jail, and saying he could do more with additional funding from the city. “I have to deal with a divergence between politics and reality about our jail,” he wrote by email. In the campaign, he has the backing of the AFL-CIO, the Democratic Party and the Democratic governor, John Bel Edwards. “I am confident he’ll continue to lead the city to brighter days ahead once he’s re-elected,” the governor said of Gusman in a statement. Gusman’s political connections have helped him raise $244,000 so far. Hutson has gotten support from a number of progressive groups but has raised closer to $55,000, according to the most recent filings.

Louisiana’s history suggests Gusman might have the upper hand in the race. In 2019, a progressive candidate sought to oust the sheriff in East Baton Rouge — whose jail has the highest number of in-custody deaths of any parish in Louisiana — but the effort failed. New Orleans has been more open to reform in recent years, though. Last December, voters elected City Councilmember Jason Williams, who ran on a reform platform, as district attorney, along with new two new judges who have welcomed oversight and released people who were wrongfully incarcerated. Although Williams has disappointed some supporters, Hutson’s backers are counting on that same energy to rally activists and grassroots organizations to help propel her into office.

Bail bonds companies line a street near the Orleans Justice Center.

Still, even some of her supporters admit to having questions about how much a progressive sheriff can actually change the system if elected. In Los Angeles, Democratic voters elected Alex Villanueva as sheriff in 2018 based on his promises of reform, but he has found himself fighting with the Civilian Oversight Commission that monitors the sheriff's department, the county Board of Supervisors, the D.A. and pretty much everyone else who stands in his way. In Mecklenburg County, Sheriff Garry McFadden, elected in 2018 on a reform platform, has had to answer to a slate of jail deaths and protests.

Those who work on progressive sheriff campaigns are not naïve to the challenges. "I do not believe a single candidate can be our salvation," says Sade Dumas, executive director of the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, one of the groups that opposes the New Orleans jail expansion. "But I believe a progressive sheriff can make things less bad by refusing to enact regressive, harmful practices."

Even some of Hutson's supporters admit to having questions about how much a progressive sheriff can actually change the system if elected.

Hutson's supporters are hopeful that, if elected, she has the best chance of overhauling the Orleans Justice Center and saving the lives of people like Christian Freeman, the man who had drugs in his system when he collapsed in the jail. Freeman had been incarcerated for a nonviolent crime and had not yet been convicted. His uncle Shannon Freeman told the *Advocate* that when his nephew, who struggled with drugs, was arrested, the family initially was relieved, hoping Christian would finally be safe. But after the death, Shannon, who calls himself as a conservative on criminal justice issues, shared another view: going to jail "shouldn't be a death sentence."

FILED UNDER: WOMEN AND POLITICS, THE FIFTY

Record of Death

Provided by LA Department of Public Safety and Corrections on 03/29/2022

2020

Offender Name: Christian Freeman

DOC #: 485724

Age / Race: 35/W

Admit Date: 5/5/2020

Facility / Housing Unit: Orleans Parish / Pod 1-A cell

Date of Death: 6/25/2020

Cause of Death: Overdose (Multiple drug toxicity)

Expected / Unexpected: Unexpected

Autopsy Ordered: Yes

Location: UMCNO

Record of Death

Provided by LA Department of Public Safety and Corrections on 03/29/2022

2020

Offender Name: Desmond Guild

DOC #: 734636

Age / Race: 27/B

Admit Date: 2/13/2020

Facility / Housing Unit: Orleans Parish / Pod 2-A cell

Date of Death: 6/20/2020

Cause of Death: Pulmonary Thromboembolism

Expected / Unexpected: Unexpected

Autopsy Ordered: Yes

Location: UMCNO