MEMORANDUM

To: Professor Armstrong and Professor Pourcia
From: Mahalie Matassa, Student
Date: April 20, 2026
Re: "Better Know a Jail" Memo – Renaissance Home for Youth

Number of Deaths Since 2014

No deaths have been recorded at Renaissance Home for Youth ("Renaissance") since its founding. Pursuant to a Public Records Request ("PRA") submitted on January 18, 2026, Renaissance produced a *zero deaths letter* confirming it "has not had any client deaths during the time requested" and "has never had a client death in [their] agency." The PRA covered September 1, 2024, to the date the request was sent. PRAs submitted by prior students covering different time periods received similar responses from Renaissance.

Facility Characteristics

Renaissance is a juvenile detention and residential facility located in Alexandria, Louisiana.[1] It is located at 6177 Bayou Rapides Road, Alexandria LA 71303,[2] on land formerly part of the Central Louisiana State Hospital vegetable farm.[3] The facility occupies a 320.15 acre campus under a 99-year land lease with the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (August 1972 through July 2071), for consideration of $1 and the public benefit of Renaissance's operations.[4] Its secure detention unit currently holds 12 beds.[5] The facility serves youth from Rapides Parish on a priority basis, and accepts youth from seven additional parishes (namely, Grant, Avoyelles, LaSalle, Vernon, Winn, Catahoula, and Concordia)[6] on a space-available basis.[7]

Renaissance operates four main programs: (1) "secure" detention for juveniles awaiting trial and placement; (2) shelter care "for abused, neglected, runaway and 'throwaway' kids"; (3) a long-term group home for treatment and rehabilitation; and (4) an on-campus school in partnership with the Louisiana Special School District.[8] Detailed population data is not formally published, which is likely due to juvenile confidentiality requirements. *See* La. Child. Code art.

[1] Facilities, Renaissance Home for Youth, https://renaissancehome.org/facilities-2/ (last visited April 17, 2026).

[2] NGO Funding Request, https://legis.la.gov/Legis/NGO/NgoDoc.aspx?NgoId=2401&search=ALL (last visited April 13, 2026).

[3] Our History, Renaissance Home for Youth, https://renaissancehome.org/our-history/ (last visited April 17, 2026).

[4] Independent Auditor's Report, *Community Receiving Home, Inc., d/b/a Renaissance* (June 30, 2025), https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/ed25bcfe1a1f7a0186258d46005af829/$file/000091e4.pdf?openelement&.7773098.

[5] Our History, *supra* note 3.

[6] Jim Butler, *Eight parishes seeking Renaissance expansion funding*, Rapides Parish Journal (Dec. 19, 2024), https://rapidesparishjournal.com/2024/12/19/eight-parishes-seeking-renaissance-expansion-funding/.

[7] Facilities, *supra* note 1.

[8] Programs & Services, Renaissance Home for Youth, https://renaissancehome.org/programs-services/ (last visited April 17, 2026).

412. Although, a YouTube video posted on the homepage of Renaissance's website captures Judge John C. Davis, 9th JDC, stating in 2022, "87 percent of children placed in Renaissance did not return to the juvenile court system."

The facility maintains a public website at renaissancehome.org, which provides its mission statement, a brief history, a program summary, the board of directors, a PREA page, and a donations page. The site does not publish operational data, population statistics, annual reports, or incident information.

Historically, Renaissance was governed by Community Receiving Home, Inc., a nonprofit organization.[9] The facility's operations were overseen by a Board of Directors, with its leadership "comprised of concerned citizens," judges, and law enforcement officials.[10] Angela Chustz serves as Executive Director of Renaissance.[11] According to ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer, she received $83,384 in compensation in FY2025.[12] It also shows that she has served as Executive Director for at least a decade. Rodney McNeal serves as Chairman, according to the facility's website.[13]

Since its founding, Renaissance has legally operated as a nonprofit organization.[14] However, in 2024, the Legislature passed SB 421 (Act No. 767, 2024 Reg. Sess.), authored by State Senator Jay Luneau,[15] converting the nonprofit into a political subdivision governed by a Board of Commissioners.[16] Specifically, the bill converts Renaissance Home for Youth "into a renaissance district, effectively transforming the nonprofit into a governmental organization."[17] According to the Legislative Auditor's fiscal note, the conversion was designed to allow the facility to "to access new sources of funding through taxes and state and federal grants" which are otherwise unavailable to nonprofits.[18] This was a strategic move evidently made in anticipation of the planned State investment. In the minutes of a June 16, 2025, meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Renaissance District, Rodney McNeal is listed as the Chairman.[19]

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[9] Our History, *supra* note 3.

[10] Facilities, *supra* note 1.

[11] Board of Directors, RENAISSANCE HOME FOR YOUTH, https://renaissancehome.org/board-of-directors/ (last visited Apr. 13, 2026).

[12] *Community Receiving Home, Inc*, Nonprofit Explorer, PROPUBLICA, https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/720740957.

[13] Board of Directors, *supra* note 11.

[14] Our History, *supra* note 3.

[15] Sen. Luneau has been affiliated with Renaissance for "26-27" years, serving as the organization's attorney and a volunteer, according to a YouTube video on its website's homepage.

[16] https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1378996.

[17] SB 421 Fiscal Note (obtained via Westlaw).

[18] *Id.*

[19] Renaissance Juvenile Detention District, Minutes of Regular Session (June 16, 2025), https://wwwprd.doa.louisiana.gov/boardsAndCommissions/MeetingMinutes/713_June%2016%202025%20Minutes.pdf.

In March 2025, Governor Jeff Landry announced a $39 million State investment in Renaissance to fund a major campus expansion,[20] increasing secure detention capacity from 12 to 56 beds.[21] Eight parishes appear to have jointly formed the Central Louisiana Juvenile Detention Center Authority to govern the expansion.[22]

Currently, Renaissance's three primary revenue sources are: (1) a parish-wide ad valorem property tax; (2) contracts with the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Children and Family Services; and (3) public contributions and grants.[23] In FY2025, Renaissance reported $2.79 million in revenue, $2.92 million in expenses, $6.91 million in total assets, and $198,000 in total liabilities.[24]

Evidence of Oversight

Renaissance holds accreditation from the American Correctional Association (ACA), first received in 1996 and maintained since for both its residential and detention programs.[25] It is also licensed by the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which oversees juvenile facilities statewide.[26] Neither ACA audit results nor DCFS licensing inspection records are publicly posted.

Additionally, Renaissance is subject to audits under the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).[27] The facility's website affirms a "zero-tolerance policy" for sexual abuse and confirms that PREA audit reports and annual data reviews are available upon request.[28] A "Notice of Audit" PDF is linked on the PREA page, confirming audits have occurred.[29] However, findings are not proactively published.

No hearings specifically focused on Renaissance's operations by the Rapides Parish Police Jury, City Council, or any state legislative committee were identified. The only formal public governance meeting located was the June 16, 2025, meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Renaissance District, in which the board voted to contract with an architect for the planned expansion. Board meeting minutes are publicly available on the Louisiana Boards and Commissions website.

No active judicial orders, injunctive relief, or consent decrees involving Renaissance were identified through searches of Docketbird (W.D. La.), Westlaw, LexisNexis, or news reporting.

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[20] Colin Vedros, *Gov. Landry: Alexandria's Renaissance Juvenile Facility to receive $39M investment*, KALB (March 25, 2025), https://www.kalb.com/2025/03/25/gov-landry-alexandrias-renaissance-juvenile-facility-receive-39m-investment/.

[21] Renaissance District, *supra* note 24.

[22] Butler, *supra* note 6.

[23] Independent Auditor's Report, *supra* note 4.

[24] ProPublica, *supra* note 12.

[25] Our History, *supra* note 3.

[26] *Id.*

[27] PREA, Renaissance Home for Youth, https://renaissancehome.org/prea/ (last visited Apr. 13, 2026).

[28] *Id.*

[29] Our History, *supra* note 3.

Evidence of Transparency

Renaissance's website provides basic operational information, including its program descriptions, board of directors, PREA policy, and institutional history.[30] The facility does not publish annual reports, population dashboards, incident reports, use-of-force data, or operational statistics.

Public statements by state and local officials about Renaissance have been limited to the 2025 expansion announcement. No regular public briefings on the facility's operations were identified. There is no online inmate locator. No advocacy organization reports specifically focused on Renaissance's operations were identified.

Overall, Renaissance's transparency footprint is minimal; although, the facility appears to provide what is legally required, but nothing more. This may be partly explained by restrictions in the Louisiana Children's Code. However, external accountability is limited, which may be a growing concern with the facility's expansion underway.

Assessment of Public Records Request

I submitted a PRA to Renaissance on January 18, 2026, requesting records on deaths in custody for the period September 1, 2024, to the present. The custodian of records responded promptly and professionally, producing a zero deaths letter without delay or fee demands. Overall, the experience was cooperative and notably smooth, demonstrating that Renaissance is willing to engage with records requests in good faith.

Notable Cases or Complaints on Facility Conditions

No lawsuits, formal complaints, or significant legal proceedings regarding conditions at Renaissance were identified within the last 5 years through searches of Docketbird, Westlaw, LexisNexis, and new reporting.

Multiple KALB news reports have referenced the facility's aging physical infrastructure as one factor of the planned expansion.[31] A 2017 *Town Talk* article offered a better glimpse into the facility, quoting one educator who described the youth as among the most challenging students in Louisiana, while emphasizing that Renaissance provides meaningful education support, including graduation ceremonies.[32]

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[30] *Id.*

[31] *See*, *e.g.*, Vedros, *supra* note 21; KALB Digital Team, *Renaissance Home for Youth seeks voters' support for tax renewal to improve operations* (Nov. 7, 2023), https://www.kalb.com/2023/11/07/renaissance-home-youth-seeks-voters-support-tax-renewal-improve-operations/.

[32] Miranda Klein, *How educators of 'most challenging students' in youth facilities carry out their job*, The Town Talk (August 23, 2017), https://www.thetowntalk.com/story/news/education/2017/08/22/how-educators-most-challenging-students-youth-facilities-carry-out-their-job/566644001/.