

# **Newsletter of the LCHR and BRCHR**

Louisiana Council on Human Relations and the  
Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations

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## **State Representative Dalton Honore Guest at the LCHR Board Meeting**

The Honorable Dalton Honore, Louisiana State Representative for district 63, was the guest at the quarterly board meeting of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations on March 28, 2015. The meeting was held at the home of James Cross in Baker. Board members of the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations, and others, were also in attendance. Representative Honore opened with an outline of some of the issues anticipated for this session of the State Legislature. The audience was then invited to ask questions and to give their views.

The State budget deficient and its effect on higher education will certainly receive lots of attention. Some other issues are health care, the legalization of marijuana in Louisiana and law enforcement.

Representative Honore serves on the following committees: Administration of Criminal Justice, Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs, Transportation, Highways and Public Works, Legislative Audit Advisory Council, House Select Committee on Homeland Security and Joint Committee on Homeland Security.

In that LSU and Southern University are located in Baton Rouge, a lot of discussion was on the effect the budget deficient will have on these two universities. Being on the Highways and Public

Works Committee and being a graduate of Southern University, Honore noted some special needs for the infrastructure at Southern University. Although he expressed respect for our governor, he outlined areas where he was in disagreement. It was stated that with this being Governor Jindal's last term, whereas in the past most of the Republicans have given the Governor unconditional support, he expects that during this session, many of them will examine issues more carefully and are likely to support issues based on their merits.

In examining issues on their merits, three of the issues Representative Honore suspects will receive greater scrutiny than in the past are the Expansion of Medicaid and the Legalization of Marijuana in Louisiana. The number of low income and elderly people that have no health care in Louisiana is well documented. The closing of the Baton Rouge General's Mid City Emergency Room is a clear example of the need for additional health care funds. Members of the audience mentioned the efforts of Together Baton Rouge (and Together Louisiana), highlighting the effect the closing of this emergency facility is predicted to have on citizens from the inter city and from North Baton Rouge. This included meetings with officials from Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center and requesting their assistance in trying to find a solution to the situation. The large increase of persons throughout Louisiana, and the United States in general, who now have medical insurance as a result of the Affordable Care Act, was noted with the hope that the effort by some to reverse this will not persist.

The issue of funding higher education was linked with the issue of the legal system, especially as to the application of the legal system to minorities. Representative Honore stated that the annual cost of keeping someone in prison is nearly the same as the annual cost of sending someone to college at LSU. Louisiana has the highest number of persons per capita in prison, not only in the United States, but than any other place in the world. This is mainly due to the number of minorities in prison. A large percentage of young Black men in prison is related to the use of marijuana. It was pointed out that the Blacks do not use illegal drugs at any higher rate than does the general population. However, Blacks being prosecuted and sentenced for the use of illegal drugs are much more likely than it is for others using drugs, especially for the use of marijuana.

In considering the selective enforcement of the law with respect to the use of marijuana and the selective enforcement of the law in other respects, Representative Honore gave a detail presentation as to why he thinks marijuana should be legalized in Louisiana and his effort to make it legal. He said he would travel to Colorado before the beginning of the legislative session to receive detail information on the results of that state legalizing marijuana.

Representative Honore has pre-filed a bill for the legalization of Marijuana in Louisiana. As mentioned above, the discussion on this issue was expanded to a discussion of the unequal treatment minorities receive in the legal system. Several State newspapers have carried articles concerning this. A summary of his presentation can be found in the following two newspapers, The Daily Chronic in an article published on January 16, 2014, Website

<http://www.thedailychronic.net/2014/27234/louisiana-lawmakers-study-discuss-marijuana-legalization/>) and the Times-Picayune in an article published on March 23, 2015, Website [http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/03/marijuana\\_decriminalization\\_sh.html](http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/03/marijuana_decriminalization_sh.html).

The title of the January 2014 article was **“Louisiana Lawmakers to Study, Discuss Marijuana Legalization”**. This is a quote from that article. “Lawmakers in Louisiana will meet later this month to discuss the “feasibility and effectiveness” of marijuana legalization in the Bayou State. The House Criminal Justice Committee will meet January 21 at the request of State Rep. Dalton Honore (D-Baton Rouge) to study the potential for marijuana legalization in Louisiana, although there is currently no pending legislation to legalize marijuana in the state. Louisiana currently has some of the harshest marijuana penalties in the country. A conviction for possessing any amount of marijuana, even a single joint, can land a person in jail for up to six months on a first offense. For a second offense, the penalty jumps to five years and a \$2,500 fine, with a third offense bringing a felony conviction and a mandatory minimum 20-year jail sentence. Last year, an attempt to eliminate the extremely harsh penalties — reducing the second offense to a maximum sentence of two years and subsequent offenses to a maximum of eight while eliminating the mandatory minimum sentence — was passed by the House but failed to gather enough support in the Senate to be brought to a debate and vote. The Legislative Fiscal Office estimated the change would have saved the state \$2.2 million in 2014 in reduced incarceration costs had the effort been successful. The sponsor of last year’s bill, Rep. Austin Badon (D-New Orleans), has introduced a similar bill for 2014, House Bill 14. If passed, jail time for a second marijuana arrest would be capped at two years and a \$500 fine, and would cap third and subsequent offenses at a maximum five years in jail and a maximum \$2,000 fine. Recent polls have found that fifty-three percent of Louisiana voters favor making marijuana legal for adults 21 and older and regulating its sales.”

The title of the March 2015 article was **“Marijuana legalization should be up to Louisiana voters, legislator says”**. The article states “Rep. Dalton Honore, D-Baton Rouge, has [filed legislation](#) to put possession, distribution and dispensing of marijuana and its derivatives on

the Louisiana ballot Nov. 8, 2016. Voters would be deciding on not only the presidential race, but also congressional seats that day as well.

Last year, 79 percent of Louisiana residents participating in an LSU survey said they supported some marijuana legalization. If Honore's initiative passed, people over 21 years-old would be able to carry and purchase marijuana without the threat of criminal charges. "If I can get it to the people, it will pass with flying colors," Honore said. Similar voter-driven initiatives lead to the legalization of marijuana in Washington state, Colorado and Washington D.C. Several state legislatures -- including most states in New England -- [are also considering](#) marijuana legalization bills. Honore said marijuana criminal charges have ruined too many lives in Louisiana. [As of June 2013](#), 1,372 Louisianians were serving sentences for simple marijuana possession. The average sentence is 8.4 years. More than 78 percent of these offenders are black. Honore has heard privately from several legislators who support marijuana legalization, but don't feel they can openly vote for its approval. But he thinks some of these lawmakers might be able to vote for a bill that would let the voters decide how they feel about the drug. "[Lawmakers] tell me 'I'm for your bill, but I can't afford to come out for it,'" Honore said. The Representative has filed [a separate bill](#) that would allow for marijuana to be dispensed and used only for medical purposes. Honore and state Sen. Fred Mills, R-New Iberia, brought up very similar medical marijuana legislation last year, but [the](#)

[proposal was killed](#) in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. “

## **The Louisiana Council and Baton Rouge Council Make Plans for a Joint Annual Meeting**

The two councils have decided to have a joint Annual Meeting on June 27, 2015. The meeting will be held in Baton Rouge at the Mount Pilgrim Family Life Center located at 9700 Scenic Highway 70807. Topics tentatively selected for discussed include The Funding of Higher Education, Health Insurance and Law Enforcement.

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