

Officers
Steven W. Usdin
Chair

Anne P. Baños
Vice Chair

Nathalie Simon
Secretary

Louis M. Freeman, Jr.
Treasurer

Ronald P. McClain
Assistant Secretary

Vanessa B. Claiborne
Assistant Treasurer

Past Chair
Merritt Lane

President & CEO
Rebecca Mowbray
Samuel Zemurray Chair in
Research Leadership

Board Members
Ryan Adkerson
Kheri Billy
Elizabeth Boh
Melanie Bronfin
Carlin Conner
Mollye M. Demosthenidy
R. Foster Duncan
Ben A. Dupuy
Perry Eastman IV
Jessie S. Haynes
Elizabeth Heffler
Patrick Hernandez
Mike Katz
John Landrum
Lauren Mastio
Graham Ralston
Patty Riddlebarger
David C. Rieveschl
Kenneth St. Charles
Syrita Steib
Douglas M. Stokes
Vera Triplett
Lamar Villere
Charles West

Honorary Board
Harry J. Blumenthal, Jr.
J. Kelly Duncan
Ludovico Feoli
Hardy B. Fowler
Louis M. Freeman
Richard W. Freeman, Jr.
Ronald J. French
Norma Grace
David Guidry
Hans B. Jonassen
Diana M. Lewis
Mark A. Mayer
Anne M. Milling
R. King Milling
Lynes R. Sloss
Sterling Scott Willis

**BUREAU OF GOVERNMENTAL
RESEARCH**
1055 St. Charles Ave., Suite 200
New Orleans, LA 70130
504-525-4152 / www.bgr.org

BGR MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release – April 9, 2025

Contact: Stephen Stuart, *Senior Vice President and Research Director*
sstuart@bgr.org
(504) 525-1668

BGR Analyzes Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office Tax Renewal on May 3 Ballot

Today, the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) released an independent, nonpartisan [analysis](#) to help New Orleans voters make an informed decision on May 3 whether to renew a 2.46-mill property tax for the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office for another 10 years. The tax would continue to provide about \$12.7 million a year to supplement funding from the City of New Orleans for the operations, maintenance, and upkeep of the Orleans Parish jail.

BGR takes a position in favor of the proposed tax renewal, with suggestions for improving public transparency, accountability, and long-term financial stability for the jail. The full position statement appears below, after BGR's key findings. Voters can also access this information in a [mobile-friendly summary on BGR's website](#) by downloading the [full report](#) and [InBrief summary](#). To broaden voter access to this information, BGR will post a Spanish translation of the InBrief.

BGR's analysis of the proposition finds that:

- The City provides the majority of funding for the Orleans Parish jail. This amounts to \$71.8 million (79%) in 2025, making the jail the City's third largest budget item behind the police and fire departments. The Sheriff's tax provides the second largest funding source for the jail, about 13%, with the rest of the budget coming from federal and state grants and other revenues.
- The Orleans Parish jail faces many challenges including staffing shortages, rising jail population, and major capital and maintenance needs. The Sheriff's Office has a [28% vacancy rate among its jail staff](#), which exceeds the 20% vacancy rate for minimum coverage based on its staffing plans. It is more than 200 employees short of optimum coverage for a safe and secure facility. These and other factors have hindered fulfilling the requirements of the jail's long-running consent decree, a legal settlement with the federal government to meet basic constitutional jail conditions and treatment of detainees. The Sheriff told BGR that the tax would provide a stable funding source to address these concerns.

- Since voters first approved the tax in 2015, specific uses of the tax revenue have not been tracked. The Sheriff's Office has developed a more transparent and strategic plan for spending the renewed tax revenue. Starting in 2026, 50% of the projected revenue would cover personnel costs at the jail. The rest would support programs and services for people in custody (30%) and facility maintenance (20%). This approach funds current initiatives and does not represent new spending.
- These spending priorities align with the office's new strategic plan and support consent decree compliance. However, the office just began implementing the plan in 2024, so more time is needed to gauge its effectiveness.
- Renewing the tax would help to maintain current operations at the jail, but it would not increase funding from the current level. Significant needs remain unfunded, such as increased staff and operational costs for the Phase III medical and mental health services wing.
- Currently, federal court monitors provide oversight of jail performance, and the City Council and the New Orleans Office of Inspector General provide oversight of the Sheriff's use of City funding. However, the revenue from the tax is controlled by the Sheriff alone with no external oversight. Furthermore, voters face a unique challenge in trying to gauge the performance of the jail, which is largely closed to public scrutiny. These factors limit their ability to evaluate whether the jail is performing adequately or if revenues from the tax are used effectively.
- The Sheriff's Office is taking steps to improve its fiscal transparency, including timely completion of annual audits and separate accounting for tax-funded expenditures in its budget. The office has also improved transparency on jail operations. It discloses incident reports and performance reports on its website, provides ways to report staff misconduct, and offers a mobile app with information and services for the public.
- Increased City appropriations are the main alternative to the tax for maintaining the current jail operations funding level. However, many factors make it uncertain that City funding could offset the loss of the tax. These include the disjointed jail governance between the City and the Sheriff, the lack of any agreement to plan future jail funding, and the City's own budget stresses. The Sheriff's financial reserves and other available revenues do not provide a long-term solution to close a recurring \$12.7 million gap if the tax is not renewed.
- Research suggests that investment of the tax revenue into the Sheriff's priority areas for jail management will promote better outcomes for people in custody, reduce staff burdens, and reduce future costs.
- The Sheriff's Office has employed several promising strategies. These include extensive data collection and collaboration with other criminal justice partners to help control the jail's population, reduce the strain on deputies and the jail's budget, and improve detainees' quality of life.

Based on the report's analysis, BGR takes the following position on the tax renewal:

FOR. This 2.46-mill property tax provides a stable source of funding for the Orleans Parish jail, which has a long road ahead to reform. Renewing the tax would help the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office maintain current staffing levels as it seeks ways to address high turnover and vacancy rates. The tax would also continue facility maintenance and programs to assist people in custody with rehabilitation. These investments can help improve conditions and safety at the jail, achieve cost savings for the public, and support broader public safety gains. These efforts are also important to comply with federal court-ordered reforms. While compliance regressed during and since the pandemic, the Sheriff's Office has put in place a strategic plan and related initiatives to reverse that trend. The tax could help sustain these efforts and avoid saddling the City with a substantial new budget obligation on top of other competing needs. BGR notes the taxing authority, called the Orleans Parish Law Enforcement District, suffers from a basic lack of transparency and accountability due to its sole control by the Sheriff. The Sheriff's Office must take steps to offset those flaws. It should regularly report on tax expenditures, as it plans to do, and its progress toward improving jail compliance, performance and outcomes. It should also use its regular meetings with the City Council to present that information to the public. These steps would enhance the reporting already available to the public on the Sheriff's Office website and support the effective use of taxpayer dollars.

If voters renew the tax, it will keep the jail operating at its current level, but it is not a long-term fix for the jail's existing and future funding challenges. These include pay increases to stabilize jail staffing and operating costs for the new Phase III mental health and medical services facility. As BGR has [recommended](#), the Sheriff, the mayor and the City Council must reach an agreement for long-range planning and budgeting processes to support stable and adequate jail funding. This is essential to regain and sustain momentum on the reforms.

About BGR's *On the Ballot* Series

These reports are part of **BGR's *On the Ballot* series**, which provides voters with independent, nonpartisan analysis of significant ballot propositions in the New Orleans metropolitan area. In producing these reports, BGR recommends positions consistent with its mission of promoting informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources to improve local government. *On the Ballot* reports highlight the strengths and weaknesses of ballot propositions and assess the potential for government expenditures or actions to efficiently achieve beneficial outcomes for citizens.

On the Ballot reports often focus on tax or charter change proposals that would be difficult for even informed citizens to assess on their own. They may hear information only from advocates or critics of a proposal. BGR looks in depth at these important ballot items with the public in mind.

* * *

BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization. Since its founding in 1932, it has been dedicated to informed public policymaking and the effective use of public resources in

April 9, 2025

Page 4

the Greater New Orleans area. For more information, call (504) 525-4152 or visit BGR's website, www.bgr.org.

BGR is a proud member of the [Governmental Research Association](#), the national organization for governmental research professionals. The GRA began in 1914, with the realization that effective policymaking requires good information, not just good intention. The GRA is home to independent organizations providing this information — trusted, objective, non-partisan, and practical research and data to local and state leaders.