

Annual Report 2024 - 2025

LOUISIANA REHABILITATION COUNCIL



Louisiana Works

Office of Workforce Development

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services

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Activities of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program

The mission of Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) is to assist persons with disabilities in their desire to obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive integrated employment and achieve independence in their communities by providing rehabilitation services and working cooperatively with business and other community resources.

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) strives for excellence in its endeavors to assist persons with disabilities in becoming competitively employed in integrated environments and reaching their maximum level of independence. LRS values providing flexible and timely services consistent with "informed choice" of the individual and in recognizing individual needs and cultural differences.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR)

Vocational Rehabilitation provides a planned sequence of individualized services to assist persons with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes. It is a partnership between a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the individual with a disability. They work together to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that is specific to the unique strengths, resources, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual. The plan identifies the VR services the individual needs in order to achieve and sustain their employment goals. These comprehensive services go far beyond those found in typical job training programs, and include such services as:

- Vocational Guidance and Counseling
- Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology
- Prosthetic and Orthotic Devices
- Home and Vehicle Modifications
- Physical and Mental Restoration
- Post-secondary Training and Supports
- Occupational Tools and Licenses
- Job Readiness Training
- Job Search and Placement Assistance
- On-the-Job Training
- Short-term Job Supports
- Supported Employment

As a result of the VR program, **1,179** individuals obtained employment in Program Year 2024. The average hourly wages of these individuals was \$18.94, with average annual earnings of \$34,873. Of those obtaining successful employment, 58% obtained employment in Louisiana's top demand occupations. This can be attributed in part to training provided to the Rehabilitation Counselors to ensure that they are knowledgeable when providing vocational guidance to individuals so they may choose a career goal that is in demand.

Order of Selection

When LRS does not have sufficient funding or staff to serve all eligible participants, federal regulations mandate that individuals with the most significant disabilities be given priority for services. LRS determines who has the most significant disabilities by implementing an Order of Selection (OOS) which is derived from an individual's functional limitations and barriers to employment that are directly resultant from their disability. Using this information, the individual's case is placed in one of the three appropriate OOS Categories ranging from most to least severe; Category 1 – Most Significantly Disabled, Category 2 – Significantly Disabled, and Category 3 – Non-Significantly Disabled. Since 2022, all OOS Categories have remained opened, eliminating the need for a deferred waiting list and allowing services to be offered to all eligible applicants.

Transition

In Program Year 2024, LRS continued to provide services to students with disabilities as they transition from high school into adulthood to pursue training and employment. LRS makes available job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. During this time period, LRS provided services to **5,408** students with disabilities.

LRS makes these services available through VR Counseling staff, fee-for-service agreements with Community Rehabilitation Programs, and through Third Party Cooperative Arrangement contracts with school districts. During Program Year 2024, LRS had 19 Third Party Cooperative Arrangements with local education providers to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services and is continuing to pursue additional contracts with local education providers.

Workforce Development

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) remains engaged with all 15 local Workforce Development Areas across the state. LRS maintains representation on each of the workforce boards, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff are actively present in the American Job Centers. To strengthen collaboration with Louisiana Works colleagues, Rehabilitation Employment Development Specialists participate in weekly virtual meetings alongside Business Service Representatives and Industry Sector Coordinators. Building relationships with employers and by connecting with human resource professionals and hiring managers, LRS ensures that consumers are linked to meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities.

Ticket-to-Work

LRS continues to strengthen efforts that support Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries in achieving their employment goals. In Program Year 2024, numerous LRS staff received specialized training on how employment affects Social Security benefits, enhancing their ability to provide consumers with clear, practical information.

LRS customers can also be referred to the LRS in-house Community Partner Work Incentives Counselor (CPWIC), who assists our SSDI and SSI beneficiaries in gaining a clear understanding of how employment affects their benefits. In addition, organizations such as Lighthouse for the Blind and the LSU Human Development Center also deliver Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) services across Louisiana, ensuring beneficiaries statewide have access to their choice of expert support.

Another component is the Cost Reimbursement Program, authorized in 1981 and available exclusively to State VR agencies. This program serves two purposes:

- Expanding access to vocational rehabilitation services for Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities.
- Generating savings for the Social Security Trust Fund (for SSDI) and the General Revenue Fund (for SSI).

In Program Year 2024, LRS received **\$1,919,491.88** from the Social Security Administration through this reimbursement program, reflecting both the agency's effectiveness in serving beneficiaries and its contribution to federal cost savings.

State as a Model Employer (SAME)

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) plays an active role in the State as a Model Employer (SAME) task force, established to expand the recruitment, hiring, and retention of individuals with disabilities in state government. The Statewide Employment Coordinator serves as LRS's Point of Contact, notifying Human Resource Managers when LRS customers apply for positions.

In Program Year 2024, fifty-six (56) LRS customers secured or maintained jobs with the State of Louisiana. Louisiana State University, LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, and the Department of Transportation and Development were the top state employers, underscoring the program's impact in advancing inclusive hiring practices.

Rehabilitation Engineering/Assistive Technology

Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology (RT/AT) services include evaluations for computer and educational technology; job-site accommodations; home and vehicle modifications; adaptive driving and transportation; seating and positioning for wheeled mobility systems; activities-of-daily living; and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). RT/AT also includes qualifying home and vehicle modifications, and non-permanent accommodations in the workplace.

Louisiana Assistive Technology Network (LATAN), the AT Act Program for the state, offers AT through device rental and loan (borrow) programs, device demonstrations, and alternative financing programs. The collaboration between LRS and LATAN continues through information, resource, and technology sharing. Additionally, LRS has approved LATAN as a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) to evaluate customers' for wheelchairs, other seating & positioning, and home modifications for accessibility needs.

LRS continues process improvement efforts for approving and renewing AT providers and provides technical assistance to regional LRS staff regarding provider requests. LRS is meeting the goal of improved screening of vocational rehabilitation providers and/or CRP Providers to better serve LRS customers.

Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program

This program provides employment opportunities for the blind by establishing and maintaining Business Enterprise Facilities. The program currently operates 55 facilities throughout the state, providing opportunities for 39 individuals who are blind to run their own food service business.

Due in large part to return-to-the-office policies implemented by the state and federal government, we anticipate that gross sales and blind vendor earnings will rebound when compared to the years since the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to this, we have provided training to vendors on best business practices, analyzing pricing, etc. We have also worked with some of our blind vendors to adopt technology that should improve their bottom line profit margins. Such technology includes the use of smart coolers to allow them to sell items they would not normally be able to sell in vending machine only locations.

Since February 2025, three (3) individuals obtained a Randolph-Sheppard license and secured a location as of the end of the program year. One additional individual was scheduled to complete training in September 2025.

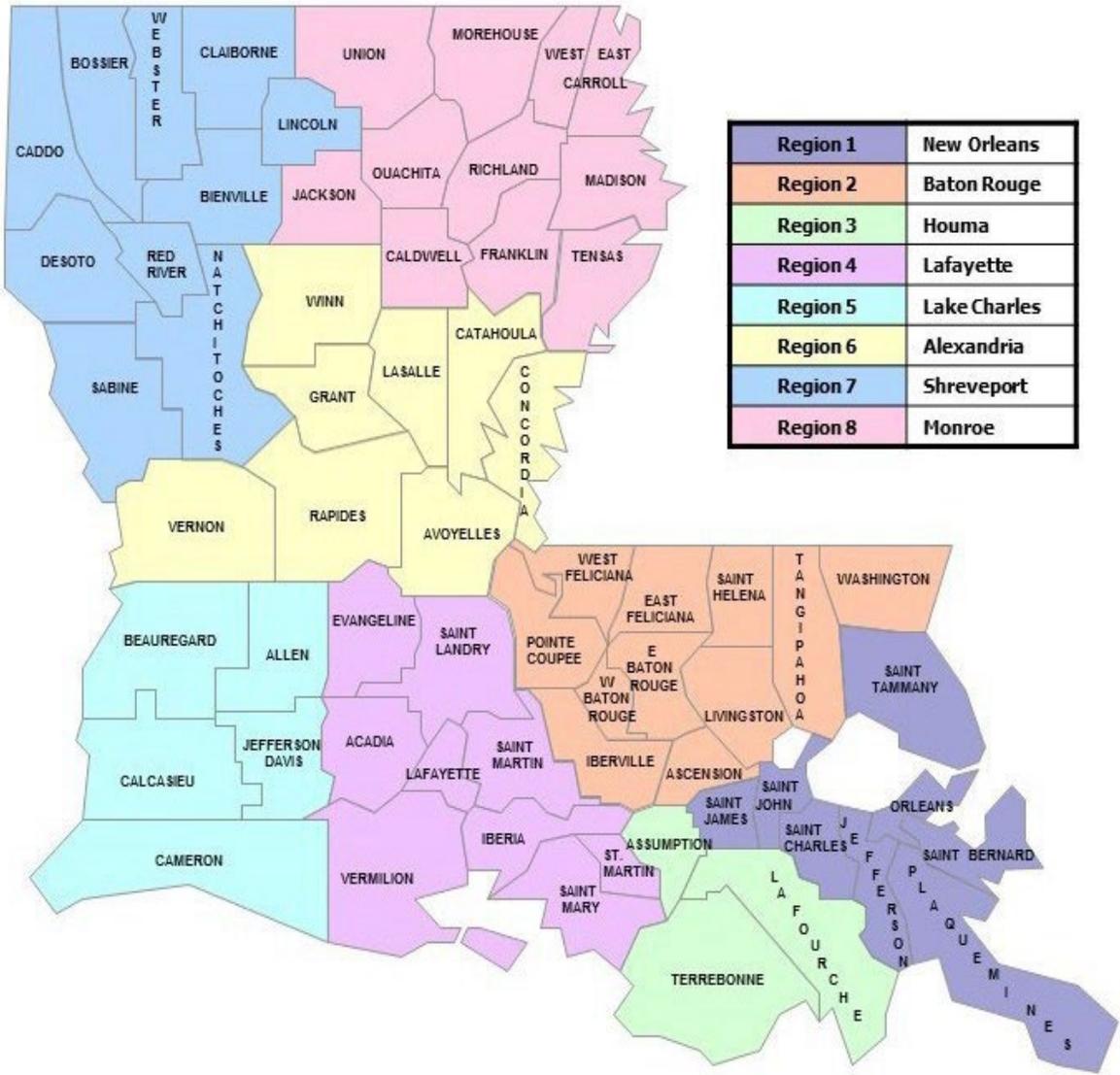
Independent Living Part B Program

Independent living Centers located statewide provide the following core services: information and referral; IL skills training; peer counseling; individual and systems advocacy; and transition services that enable individuals to move the community from nursing homes and other institutions. Independent living services were received by **5,479** individuals at an average cost of \$59.94 per customer during Program Year 2024.

Independent Living Older Blind Program

The four (4) Rehabilitation Centers contracting for the provision of Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) services provided training to perform activities of daily living; orientation and mobility training; provision of low vision evaluations and magnification aids; advocacy skills training; information and referral services; and etc., to a total of **1,739** individuals from across the State of Louisiana who are aged 55 years or older and have significant visual impairments.

LRS PARTICIPANTS SERVED IN PY 2024



Region 1	3,615
Region 2	5,616
Region 3	826
Region 4	2,249
Region 5	1,043
Region 6	1,152
Region 7	2,659
<u>Region 8</u>	<u>2,545</u>
Statewide	19,705

LRS Participant Success Stories



Irie Arnaud came to LRS in 2021 already in the midst of her college journey. Irie's disabilities include learning, speech, and visual impairments. LRS provided assistance to cover the cost of tuition, books, and supplies for Irie to complete her Bachelor's degree and achieve a Master's degree in Social Work. Irie then began her employment search with the help of an LRS Rehabilitation Employment Development Specialist. During job searching efforts, LRS identified the need for and provided Irie with several Rehabilitation Technology devices, speech therapy sessions, and transportation to attend these sessions out of town. With the help of all of the services provided by LRS, Irie achieved her desired employment goal and began working for Goodwill Industries as a Career Navigator in August 2024.

Jason Lenard heard of LRS by word of mouth in the recovery community and wanted to change his life; so, he decided to become a Truck driver. With Jason's eager determination and cooperation, LRS quickly assisted him to participate in required training through Coastal Truck Driving Academy to obtain the appropriate licensure. Upon completion of training and obtaining his CDL, an LRS Rehabilitation Employment Development Specialist assisted Jason in finding a job. He is now driving cross-country in the southern United States for USA Truck.

Quote from Jason, "LRS helped me tremendously. It changed my life and my children's lives. I was very fortunate to have come into contact with LRS to receive their services and benefit from them."





Jaslin Henry considers her Vocational Rehabilitation story to be one of resilience, determination, and victory! Jaslin applied for services with LRS expressing hopes to transition from jobs that she no longer enjoyed, and to find a better career opportunity that met her interests, strengths, and capabilities. She reported challenges of independently securing new employment due to limitations that reduced her confidence in reaching personal and professional goals. Jaslin remained open to guidance and counseling. She embraced the findings and recommendations of assessments, learned to express work interests, and recognized how transferable skills would work in her favor. With the help of job coaching, appropriate services, and additional supports, Jaslin's goals were finally in reach. In February 2025, Jaslin secured employment as an Ophthalmology Technician. She self-advocated for short-term job supports to stabilize employment, and achieved that goal shortly thereafter. Jaslin also proudly reported being offered a promotion with her employer shortly thereafter.

Valerie Bass, Attorney-at-Law

“After graduation, I had the pleasure of working for a boutique family law firm working on divorce and custody cases. However, I kept feeling like I had a bigger purpose and wanted to give back to others going through the same obstacles I faced in education. I was then given the opportunity to work at my alma mater, South Texas College of Law, in the Bar Readiness Department as an Assistant Director. In this role, I get to work hands-on helping students with disabilities get accommodations for major exams like the MPRE and Bar Exam, both of which are required to become a practicing attorney. I also aid them in their preparation of such exams. During the semester, I aid the Assistant Deans of my department in teaching the students, providing workshops and practice exams, and meeting with the students. Thanks to Louisiana Rehabilitation Services and all those who helped me through both my undergraduate and graduate studies, I am a Law School graduate and licensed Attorney. I get to help other people with disabilities achieve their academic and career goals. I hope to continue giving back by supporting other young students from Louisiana achieve their goals in becoming attorneys, despite any obstacle they may face.”



Anthony Olivier



“I would like to say that I am where I am in my life due the many services and assistance I have received from LRS over the years. I am grateful to LRS and the many people I have worked with in the agency for the many resources provided throughout my college education, and in my career as an Environmental Scientist with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

Over the years, LRS provided funding for me to attend college (LSUE & McNeese) to earn an Associate’s Degree in Science, and Bachelor’s Degree in Environmental Science. Most recently, LRS provided the resources and funding for me to receive multiple prosthetic limbs, socks, liners and other components related to my disability. All of this assistance has enabled me to maintain my employment as an Environmental Scientist and have more independence in my daily life.

My above-the-knee amputation of the left leg primarily affects my ability to be ambulatory in my daily job and life. My job requires that I be able to ambulate in many different environments that include paved surfaces, gravel, dirt, grass, woodlands, and sometimes wetlands. I also provide regulatory and clean up oversight along with other state and federal partners in response to hazmat releases, oil spills, and many other scenarios that are an immediate threat to human health and the environment. The physical requirements of the job can sometimes be very demanding and without a prosthetic limb, I would not be able to comply with my job duties. My job requires that I be “on call” 24 hours a day so that if an emergency arises, I must be able to respond. I am very proud of my job as an Environmental Scientist and believe that it is my responsibility to ensure that our environment remains safe and free of threats that can impact the environment and the health and safety of the general public. I have been successfully employed with DEQ for the past 19 years.

I would like to again say thank you for all LRS has done to help me obtain an education and career.”

Jasmine Mitchell, O.D.



Jasmine Mitchell came to LRS as a transition student while in high school. She was in need of assistance for low vision aids to accommodate her vision loss, as well as Assistive Technology training to learn how to use these devices. Through Vocational Guidance and Counseling, Jasmine also began her career pursuits. LRS provided assistance with college training, maintenance (room/board), books, assistive technology devices, assistive technology training and all necessary support services. She and her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor strategized to address assistive technology and accommodations needed throughout her educational pursuits. Once Jasmine obtained her Bachelor's Degree, she was accepted into Optometry School at University of Houston. LRS worked diligently to establish University of Houston

as a vendor, identify where she was going to live while in Houston, and assisted with all that was needed to succeed. During her time at University of Houston, a very close family member endured a serious medical condition, but Jasmine never stopped pursuing her career goals. Her grit and determination resulted in Jasmine graduating from University of Houston as an Optometrist. After 9 years of continuing on her career tract, Dr. Jasmine Mitchell is now a fully licensed Optometrist working in Washington DC. Her present wages are over \$150,000/year. She hopes to move back to Louisiana in the near future and would love to be a provider for LRS.

Dr. Mitchell's drive and perseverance resulted in a successful outcome as she followed her career pathway from high school through full doctoral licensure using guidance provided by her Counselor and services through LRS. She is very grateful for the support LRS has provided to her throughout the years.

Jasmine provided this statement:

“Louisiana Rehabilitation Services played a vital role in helping me achieve my goals. Through their financial assistance, providing specialized equipment and support for my vision difficulties, I was able to keep pace with my peers throughout college despite my disabilities. Today, as a licensed optometrist, I have the privilege of helping others in need, a dream that would not have been possible without the unwavering support of LRS.”



Collaboration Between Louisiana Rehabilitation Council & Louisiana Rehabilitation Services

The Louisiana Rehabilitation Council (LRC) meets with Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) quarterly as a part of the Council meeting. During these meetings, LRS provides quarterly updates, and the LRC provides input and recommendations to LRS.

During Program Year 2024, the LRC chose to revise their Bylaws to include establishing new standing committees intended to provide focused review and comment to LRS. These new committees are: 1) Executive; 2) Legislative; 3) Community Rehabilitation Program; and 4) Community Outreach. LRS staff attend the committee meetings as subject matter experts and much of the interaction includes exchanges of information to achieve greater clarity in order to assist members to review, analyze, and advise LRS regarding the performance of its responsibilities related to 29 U.S.C. §725. While detail work is conducted during committee meetings, all comments and recommendations are made from the full LRC.

The following is a list of activities and accomplishments of the LRC for Program Year 2024 (July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025).

- In July 2024, the LRS Statewide Needs and Customer Satisfaction Survey was disseminated to the public. This instrument incorporated additional questions as specifically requested by the Council, and provided opportunities for the public to provide feedback to be shared with the Council and/or to be contacted by a Council member. This survey was active allowing for participation through the month of September and resulted in 1,358 respondents (59% self-identified as an individual with a disability). The Council was provided with the comments from this survey, and the contact information for those who requested to be contacted by a member. The LRC Chair recommended utilizing an outside entity (Louisiana State University Shreveport's Institute for Non-profit Administration and Research – LSUS INAR) to use the data from this survey as intended to formulate the resulting Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) for LRS.
- During the November 2024 LRC meeting, Council members requested specific LRS programmatic and performance data for a stakeholder “Fact Sheet” to be created and shared with Legislators to request additional State funding on behalf of LRS.
- During the April 2025 LRC meeting, the Council was provided an electronic copy of the 2025 LRS CSNA, which was developed with the assistance of LSUS INAR. Council members were also invited and encouraged to attend the LRS Strategic Planning meeting.
- During the 2025 legislative session, LRS received an additional \$4 million in State General Fund appropriation. This funding allowed LRS to access an additional \$14.7 million in Federal funds, for a total of \$18.7 million in

additional funds for Vocational Rehabilitation. This tremendous accomplishment is largely due to the efforts afforded by Council members and key stakeholders.

- Three (3) Council members attended the LRS Strategic Planning meeting in June 2025, along with LRS Executive staff and Regional Managers, and participated by asking clarifying questions and making recommendations to Goals, Priorities, and Strategies, which will also be reflected in the update to Louisiana's Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan for 2026.



In Memoriam



Lynn Stevens

Louisiana Rehabilitation Council Chair

November 22, 2024

Lynn was an extraordinarily loving person with a heart for taking care of the community and others in need. Lynn was always found volunteering, advocating, or organizing events. With her tireless efforts working for three non-profits agencies, she was always an advocate for community change and the underdog. In 2022, Lynn was honored by Governor John Bel Edwards with a GOLD Award as the Patsy Barrett Memorial Award winner for her outstanding leadership as an advocate for people with disabilities. Lynn was often found talking to public officials regarding issues she encountered or saw. Throughout Lynn's career, she raised over \$55 million dollars to assist with non-profit operations.

Lynn did all of these wonderful things with passion and a smile on her face in spite of having FSH Muscular Dystrophy. This made her a strong advocate for disability rights, wanting to overcome prejudices, and bringing equality to all. Her unwavering commitment to making our community more inclusive will not be forgotten.

The following membership composition reflects Governor-appointments effective as of 6/30/2025.

LRC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Brian Patchett	Chair / Represents individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves
Rikki David	Vice-Chair / Business, Industry, and Labor Representative
Megan Thompson	Secretary / State Department of Education Representative
Hope Day	Member-at-Large / Represents individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves
Kelly Monroe	Legislative Committee Chair / Represents individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves
Timothy Cornelius	Community Rehabilitation Program Committee Chair / Business, Industry and Labor Representative
Robyn Rushing	Community Outreach Committee Chair / Represents individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves

LRC MEMBERS

Melissa Bayham	Director of Louisiana Rehabilitation Services
Stephen Carrier	Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Jeannie Doiron	Client Assistance Program Representative
Sherri Houin	Business, Industry and Labor Representative
Amanda Nottingham	Business, Industry and Labor Representative
Nicole Poiencot	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Bambi Polotzola	Statewide Independent Living Council Representative
Donna Reno	Represents individuals with disabilities who have difficulty representing themselves
Tina Roper	State Workforce Investment Council Representative
Myron Wright	Former recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation services

MEETING CALENDAR 2024 - 2025

July 25, 2024
Alexandria (Public Forum)

November 7, 2024
Baton Rouge (Public Forum)

February 24, 2025
Baton Rouge (Public Forum)

April 24, 2025
Baton Rouge (Public Forum)

June 9, 2025
Lafayette (Public Forum)

LRC CONTACT INFORMATION

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Louisiana Rehabilitation Council

Purpose:

- L**isten to the concerns of those with disability issues.
- R**eview, analyze, and evaluate the state rehabilitation program.
- C**ollaborate with state agencies, organizations & participant groups.

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services State Office

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Louisiana Rehabilitation Services Regional Offices

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Metairie, LA 70003
(504) 838-5180 (V/TDD)
1-800-737-2957 (In State)

Lake Charles Region V

3616 Kirkman Street
Lake Charles, LA 70607
(337) 475-8038 (V/TDD)
1-800-520-0589 (In State)

Baton Rouge Region II

950 North 22nd Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
(225) 295-8900 (V/TDD)
1-800-737-2959 (In State)

Alexandria Region VI

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Alexandria, LA 71301
(318) 487-5335 (V/TDD)
1-800-520-0578 (In State)

Houma Region III

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1-800-520-0584 (In State)

Shreveport Region VII

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