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These Louisiana leaders will form an unlikely alliance to tackle New Orleans crime

Gov.-elect Jeff Landry has allied with a former political foe in New Orleans to tackle crime there.

By JAMES FINN | Staff writer Nov 29, 2023 3 min to read



Louisiana Governor-elect Jeff Landry talks about a partnership with New Orleans DA Jason Williams, to Landry's left, is his spouse, Sharon, left, with newly appointed LSP superintendent Robert P. Hodges and newly elected attorney general Liz Murrill, during a press conference in the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023, (Staff Photo by David Grunfeld, The Times-Picayune)

STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD



For much of his eight-year tenure as state attorney general, and for months on the campaign trail this year, Gov.-elect Jeff Landry has [railed against](#)

[Democratic leaders](#) in New Orleans, blaming them for the city's crime rate.

On Wednesday Landry, a Republican, announced one of the first steps his budding administration will take towards addressing that issue: an unlikely collaboration with Orleans Parish District Attorney Jason Williams, a progressive Democrat and political foe of Landry's, under which the attorney general's office will take on a bigger role in prosecuting crimes in the Crescent City.

Speaking at a [splashy press conference](#) on the field of the Caesars Superdome, Landry said that after his administration's Jan. 8 inauguration, Attorney General-elect Liz Murrill will start prosecuting defendants arrested in Orleans Parish as a result of Louisiana State Police investigations. Landry also used the occasion to announce his new State Police chief: Major Robert Hodges, a 28-year agency veteran.

The announcements made clear that New Orleans [will remain a focus](#) of Landry's approach to criminal justice policy. It came amid a jostling for power within New Orleans' criminal legal system as local leaders brace for a new reality under Landry's leadership.



Louisiana Governor-Elect Jeff Landry announced the appointment of Robert P. Hodges as the 27th Louisiana State Police Superintendent during a press conference in the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023. Major Hodges is a 28-year veteran with Louisiana State Police. He began his career in 1995 as a Patrol Trooper in Troop B (Kenner). Major Hodges, a native of New Orleans, graduated from Brother Martin High School and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from Louisiana State University. (Staff Photo by David Grunfeld, The Times-Picayune)

STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD

Landry has revealed few specifics about how he will act to shape New Orleans. But at a [press conference last month](#), he alluded to making the city more like “other great southern cities,” naming Nashville and Charleston, South Carolina as examples.

Williams stood next to Landry near the visitors’-side entrance to the field Wednesday and said he had faith in the governor-elect’s approach. Above the empty field, TV screens usually reserved for football scores blared “Governor-elect press conference.”

"He knows that the economic health, the public health, the public safety of New Orleans is crucial to the entire state," Williams told reporters. "I'm here today to stand with him and to stand with the new Attorney General to make it abundantly clear that partnerships have to become the norm, not the exception."

"You look around the country, you don't often see Republicans and Democrats sitting down to solve the toughest problems," Williams added. "And that's what we've been doing, focusing on crime in the city of New Orleans."

Landry's history of antagonizing New Orleans' political leadership had raised questions about his intentions for the city. Last year, he suggested in an interview with Tucker Carlson that he would bend New Orleans to his will.



Louisiana Governor-elect Jeff Landry and his wife Sharon, walk into a press conference in the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023. (Staff Photo by David Grunfeld, The Times-Picayune)

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And he has clashed more recently with Williams.

As prosecutors, the two men's philosophies could hardly be more different. Williams has [declined to prosecute drug possession charges](#) aside from fentanyl and heroin. And he has suggested he wouldn't prosecute abortion-related charges — [part of the reason](#) Landry threatened last year to withhold state funding from the city over its abortion policies.

Before his October victory in the Louisiana governor's race, Landry said he would exercise whatever authority is available to him when it comes to Williams' office because he felt the local prosecutor wasn't doing enough to curb violent crime.

Instead, the two officials announced their new "partnership" on Wednesday. Besides Murrill's office handling the prosecution of State Police police cases in Orleans Parish, Landry said more state troopers could be dispatched to the city, though he declined to provide specifics.

"This new partnership will assist in restoring the rule of law to this city, and providing victims the justice they deserve," Landry said.

Landry on Wednesday also said he has tapped Gen. Thomas Friloux, a 35-year veteran of the Louisiana National Guard with multiple combat deployments to the Middle East, to lead that agency. He named former state Rep. Bryan Adams, currently a top aide to Jefferson Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng and a former interim chief of the East Bank Consolidated Fire Department, as his state fire marshal.

Hodges will take over as State Police superintendent after overseeing that agency's Region 2 Patrol, which encompasses 18 southern parishes and includes Troop C in Gray, Troop D in Lake Charles and Troop I in Lafayette. He started his career in 1995 as a Patrol Trooper in Kenner and has worked as an intelligence officer in the Louisiana Army National Guard Reserve, a State Police spokesman said.



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Hodges will succeed [current Supt. Col. Lamar Davis](#), who led the agency through a festering controversy over troopers' beatings of Black motorists, including the brutal 2019 death of Ronald Greene. Davis announced earlier this month that he will retire in January.

Greene's beating was one of [several in a relatively short period](#) in which members of Troop F, which patrols a dozen northeast Louisiana parishes, employed brutal tactics on Black motorists, Greene among them.

The incidents plunged State Police into a scandal that has yielded promises of reform and [a salvo of investigations](#) from the federal and state level into the agency's culture and tactics.

Hodges and Landry declined to answer questions Wednesday about whether the agency would forge ahead with implementation of some of those reforms. Those include a host of [recommended changes](#) to the agency’s use-of-force guidelines detailed in a two-year audit released by a private consulting firm last month.

But Murrill, a seasoned litigator and Republican who currently serves in the attorney general’s office as Landry’s top deputy, said her office will open its own probe into State Police – and will continue to aid in an ongoing U.S. Department of Justice civil rights investigation into the agency’s practices.

“Our office takes that matter very seriously,” Murrill said.

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