



Citizens for **1** Greater New Orleans  
[www.citizensfor1greaterneworleans.com](http://www.citizensfor1greaterneworleans.com)

Status Report  
2008



# Citizens for **1** Greater New Orleans

## A Status Report

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# Building a Greater New Orleans



We are proud to present the report of our organization's activities for 2008 and to thank the countless determined and civic-minded volunteers who have contributed their time and talents. In the last year, we have continued to push for reform in key areas of criminal justice, ethics and education. Progress is happening thanks to citizen volunteers from across our city, region and state who are committed to reform and rebuilding, and who have stayed engaged, speaking up and advocating for positive change.

Here's what we have learned during the past three years:

- There is power in the citizen voice!
- For real reform and lasting change to take place, there must be sustained commitment by involved, self-reliant citizens who demand and expect honest, responsive government from their political leaders.
  - Building effective, broad-based coalitions on a local and statewide level is key to New Orleans' recovery.
  - We remain persistent, focused and determined not to take responsible government for granted.

These reforms are the beginning of a movement for recovery and renewal of our city. Other reforms are needed if we are to prosper in the future and if we are to make our community a good place for families to live and grow. This requires a commitment from all of us.

With more than 20,000 registered members, our Web site provides a vehicle to voice your opinion to legislators. During a single year, users sent more than 1.6 million e-mail messages from the site as they weighed in about the issues of levee and property tax assessment reform. The site contains up-to-date information about local issues, resources and helpful links. We encourage you to visit [Citizensfor1.com](http://Citizensfor1.com) and sign up to join us. This is your opportunity to participate in our city's future!

Our thanks to all of our volunteers, and special thanks to Jay Lapeyre and the Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region for their sustained support.

Ruthie Frierson, Founder and Chair  
Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

# Leadership

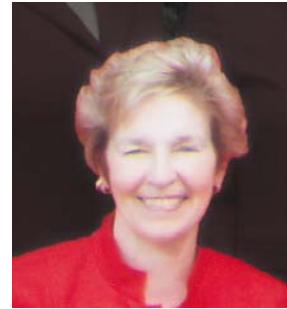
A 12-member Executive Committee leads the thousands of supporters who comprise Citizens for1 Greater New Orleans.



**Ruthie Frierson**  
Chair and Founder



**Kay Kerrigan**  
Vice Chair,  
Founding Member



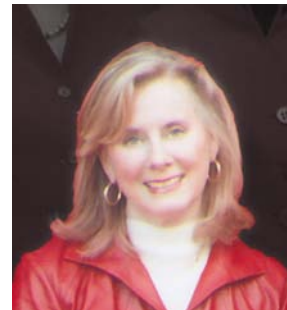
**Janet Bean**  
Recording Secretary,  
Founding Member



**Barbara Bush**  
Treasurer,  
Founding Member



**Bonnie Conway**  
Founding Member



**Stephanie Haynes**  
Founding Member



**Patti Lapeyre**  
Founding Member



**Betsy Nalty**  
Founding Member



**Karyn Noles**  
Founding Member



**Ann Rabin**  
Founding Member



**Mimi Smith**  
Founding Member



**Nicole Spangenberg**  
Founding Member

# A Growing Force for Change

*"It is the duty of the good citizen not to be silent."  
—Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908)*

IN ANY SOCIETY, at any time, dramatic events can occur that demand a response greater than government alone can provide. At such times the circumstances can be so dire, and the potential consequences of doing nothing so severe, that ordinary citizens instinctively realize they must act.

Such a moment arose in 2005 when disaster struck New Orleans and challenged government at every level. Broken floodwalls had fatally exposed the city to a tidal surge produced by Hurricane Katrina. As government struggled in the aftermath of a catastrophic flood, citizens turned out in throngs to help.

One group began looking deeper into the city's future. In November 2005, 120 local residents gathered to consider such looming questions as: What can we do to prevent a recurrence of this disaster? How can we rebuild to create a better city than we had before? They focused immediately on the local flood protection system.

With that gathering, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans was born. Led by local businesswoman and longtime activist Ruthie Frierson, the group threw itself into a campaign to overcome the state Legislature's failure to reform the workings of southeast Louisiana's levee boards.

Through community and legislative outreach and public education, the group advocated for creation of a unified levee board comprised of experts who would be guided by sound principles and would operate transparently and without political patronage. The group collected some 53,000 signatures on a petition calling for levee board reform.

The result: In March 2006, the Legislature approved historic legislation to dissolve local levee commissions and create the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority. Six months later, Louisiana voters approved a constitutional amendment to consolidate and reform levee management in the region.

Using that success as a springboard, the fledgling group of activists took on additional challenges. They began advocating in such areas as property tax assessment, crimefighting, education and governmental ethics. With each step forward, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans grew into a more powerful force for change.

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian grassroots organization that aims to be a voice for reform and renewal for greater New Orleans and Louisiana. A 12-member executive committee leads the all-volunteer group, which today has more than 20,000 supporters.

The pages that follow summarize the group's initiatives and progress to date, and articulate its major objectives for the coming year. Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans invites the input of concerned citizens everywhere and urges all who care about the future of greater New Orleans to become involved.

## Criminal Justice Reform

CITIZENS FOR 1 GREATER New Orleans recognizes that public safety is crucial to the city's recovery. The glaringly dysfunctional criminal justice system provoked a great deal of ire, post-Katrina. Citizens for 1 formed the Criminal Justice Reform Committee in June 2006 in an effort to gain a better understanding of the system.

The committee explored the system by conducting in-depth interviews and forming relationships with key decision makers. The group published its findings in a January 2007 report that recommended:

- increased transparency and accountability through an integrated communication system linking all criminal justice components;
- formation of a citizen-led "watch dog" group;
- creation of a broad-based collaborative to advance reform efforts.

Two important results of the committee's were the creation of Court Watch NOLA and the New Orleans Crime Coalition.

### **COURT WATCH NOLA**

Members of the Citizens for 1 Executive Committee conceived of Court Watch NOLA to monitor the progress of cases through the criminal courts system, which critics saw as being inefficient and lacking in accountability. Launched in June 2007 with support from Common Good, the Metropolitan Crime Commission and the Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region, Court Watch NOLA now has a professional executive director and board of directors. To date, some 120 volunteers have observed more than 400 open criminal court cases. Quarterly reports by Court Watch NOLA have focused on the "100 oldest cases" and provided the public with impartial performance ratings of judges, the District Attorney's Office, public defenders, police and the Criminal Sheriff's Office.

### **NEW ORLEANS CRIME COALITION**

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans is a founding member of New Orleans Crime Coalition, an organization of regional businesses and civic groups whose goal is to focus the resources of police, prosecutors and the judicial system on convicting and incarcerating career criminals. Created in February 2007, the coalition sought and secured federal funding to help increase the size of the local police force and improve coordination between police and prosecutors.

### **ORLEANS PARISH JUVENILE DETENTION ALTERNATIVES INITIATIVE**

The Criminal Justice Reform Committee also recognizes the need to focus on juvenile offenders and has worked with Orleans Parish Juvenile Court in its Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. Citizens for 1 is represented on the initiative's advisory committee, which is working to assess current and future service needs of juvenile offenders. Citizens for 1 advocates a service model supported by research of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Members of the Criminal Justice Reform Committee have testified at City Council meetings in support of this model. The committee extensively researched best practices and made recommendations, in a published report, to various government officials regarding conditions

for youth housed at the Orleans Parish Youth Study Center and proposed plans for a full-service juvenile complex.

**2008 ACTIVITIES**

The Criminal Justice Reform Committee interviewed key stakeholders about how to improve accountability and effectiveness. Committee members discussed critical issues with judges from Criminal Court, the Louisiana Supreme Court, and Juvenile Courts of Orleans and Jefferson parishes; the acting New Orleans District Attorney; New Orleans Police Department management and district officers; the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff; the U.S. Attorney; the district FBI director; the director of New Orleans Office of Recovery and Development; and the lieutenant governor of Louisiana.

Organizations that have offered assistance in improving accountability include Court Watch NOLA, New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation, Metropolitan Crime Commission, Baptist Community Ministries and Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana. In addition, members of the committee participate on the executive committee and board of the New Orleans Crime Coalition.

Members of the Criminal Justice Reform Committee regularly attend the New Orleans City Council’s Criminal Justice meetings to monitor their activities and support appropriate legislation. The committee also has met with key groups such as After School Partnership, New

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Orleans Truancy Center and Youth Works!, and a committee member held a community meeting to introduce Shared Hope, an international organization that publishes reports on sexual exploitation of children.

Members of the Criminal Justice Reform Committee worked with Orleans Parish Juvenile Court to submit a federal funding request to Congress for local juvenile justice reform initiatives. A revised funding package was submitted later in 2008.

The committee chair spoke before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and participated in a panel discussion about New Orleans that focused on Court Watch NOLA and citizen advocacy. Committee members also met with U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu and U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey to brief them on local citizen-led crime-fighting efforts.

Citizens for 1 joined with Silence is Violence and the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association to voice support for retaining the National Guard presence in New Orleans.

Committee members monitored contractual agreements proposed to reduce crime, including the operation of crime cameras and the Total Sentencing Alternatives Program. Coordination with City Council members to monitor agreements has proven to be vital in developing programs that truly deter crime.

Committee members testified before the New Orleans City Council concerning the conditions of confinement at the Youth Study Center and supported the formation of the Children's Youth and Planning Board. A letter from Citizens for 1 urging management changes at the Youth Study Center appeared in The Times-Picayune, which subsequently published an exposé and editorial about conditions at the center.

Committee members testified at City Council budget hearings in behalf of the District Attorney Office budget request and supported the Indigent Defender budget request.

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans continued to inform the citizenry about election issues and candidates. The group co-sponsored a District Attorney Candidates Forum at Loyola University.

**THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM COMMITTEE**

Ann Rabin, Chair

Nicole Spangenberg, Vice Chair

Brenda Brown

Brenda Fenner

Zully Jimenez

Barbara Bush

Kara French

Patti Lapeyre

Pam Farnsworth

Ruthie Frierson

Linda Roussel

## Education Reform

THE DISASTROUS flood of 2005 all but destroyed the New Orleans public school system. Before planning the rebuilding, the city had to face the fact that the schools had been part of one of the worst-performing systems in the country, and that the only way to properly serve local children is to create a world-class education system that puts students first.

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans became involved in this effort early on by taking an advocacy role in the transformation of the city's public education system. The group has established close ties and maintains lines of communication with state legislators, school boards, charter school administrators, business leaders, and national and local nonprofit organizations. By collaborating with other organizations, Citizens for 1 helped advance an educational reform agenda in the state Legislature.



The organization has developed relationships with other groups that focus directly on education, including the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University; New Leaders for New Schools; Teach for America; the New Teacher Project; and New Schools for New Orleans.

Working through its Education Committee, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans met with leaders of these groups to determine how to help communicate their goals and objectives to the public. One result of the meetings was that representatives of Citizens for 1 began directly participating in some of the organizations, including the boards of new charter schools.

### **2008 ACTIVITIES**

In the spring, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans co-hosted a forum for public education with the Scott S. Cowen Institute and the Urban League. Citizens for 1 used its Web site, e-mail blasts and personal appearances on television and radio talk shows to publicize the event and educate the public as to the importance of attending and participating. The event, held on the Tulane campus, drew some 700 people and greatly expanded the ranks of supporters for charter schools and local reform efforts.

The Education Committee stands ready to continue its advocacy and has compiled a database of about 75 individuals who have agreed to participate whenever they are needed.

## Governmental Ethics Reform

RECOGNIZING THAT government corruption and waste seriously damage both the city's ability to serve its citizens and its public image as a good place to live, work and do business, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans is committed to improving ethics policies and practices in local government. Much of its work to date has involved public education and reform advocacy.

The organization's initial efforts in this area focused on raising awareness of a 1995 city ordinance that provided for creation of an Ethics Review Board and Office of Inspector General. Through actions of the Mayor and City Council, the first Ethics Review Board was named in January 2007; six months later the board hired the city's first Inspector General.

Successful operation of the Inspector General's Office required passage of new state legislation that would enable coordination between local and state authorities. Citizens for 1 assisted in educating voters about the need for and impact of such legislation. A successful 2007 ballot measure provided for interagency coordination, gave the Office subpoena power outside its local jurisdiction and assured the confidentiality of preliminary investigations.



Citizens for 1 joined with Common Good and the Urban League of Greater New Orleans in sponsoring a forum to educate the public about how the new ethics reform authorities would operate within city government. Supported by a number of other groups, the forum drew more than 450 citizens.

### **2008 ACTIVITIES**

A Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans Executive Committee member participated on Gov. Bobby Jindal's ethics transition team and attended the governor's press conference on ethics reform. The organization joined with the coalition Louisiana Ethics 1 to lobby for the governor's ethics reform package during the special session of the Legislature.

Citizens for 1 sponsored a public meeting to provide a six-month update by the new Inspector General about the activities of his office. About 500 citizens attended the event.



When it became clear that the Inspector General would need independent assistance to monitor the workings of the local police department, Citizens for 1 worked to educate the populace about proposed legislation to set up a monitoring authority.

Voters subsequently approved amending city law to establish an Independent Police Monitoring Division within the Office of the Inspector General. The measure added protections from political interference by future mayors and city councils whose decisions

the Office will monitor. It also provided for a dedicated source of revenue and authorized the Inspector General to hire independent legal counsel.

## New Orleans Master Plan

A LONG-RUNNING issue in city government has been the fact that provisions in the city's master plan for land use and development were not properly reflected in the zoning laws and ordinances that regulate local land use. Without the force of law behind it, the master plan had limited practical effect, and land-use decisions tended to be made on a case-by-case basis, with the City Council approving or rejecting each request for a variance from the city code.

In 2008, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans threw its support behind a charter change that would give the city's master plan the force of law. Voters approved the measure in November.

Subsequently, the focus shifted to the master plan itself and the ongoing effort to update the plan. Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans will participate in the process and will continue to advocate in behalf of sound master planning and code enforcement throughout the city.

# Levee Board Reform

HURRICANE Katrina and the ensuing flood put south Louisiana's existing flood protection and levee board system under a spotlight. The metropolitan New Orleans area levee boards were seen as seats of patronage and incompetence. Reform was necessary not just



to erase an image of political corruption, but to fix a broken system that directly or indirectly had cost lives and damaged the property of citizens the system was supposed to protect.

State Sen. Walter Boasso introduced legislation to merge the metropolitan area levee boards into a single system. The bill would also take functions unrelated to flood protection out of the levee boards' hands; remove politics from board member selection and appointments; and require that board members have appropriate credentials and qualifications.

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans led the movement for levee board consolidation and reform. Through community, media and legislative outreach, and public education programs the group urged the creation of a unified levee authority comprised of experts who would operate openly, professionally and according to sound principles, without a hint of political patronage.

The citizen initiative collected 53,000 signatures on a petition calling for levee board reform. Media and political observers cited the effort as a major factor in the governor's decision call a special legislative session in February 2006. The grassroots coalition held a rally on the opening day of the session in Baton Rouge. More than 1,200 concerned citizens traveled to the state Capitol to rally in support of levee board reform. Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans volunteers had a strong presence at committee meetings and on the floor of the House and Senate during the session.

In March 2006, the Louisiana Legislature approved historic legislation which dissolved local levee commissions and created the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority. In September 2006, Louisiana voters approved Constitutional Amendment No. 3, approving consolidation and reform of levee management in southeast Louisiana.

Constitutional Amendment No. 3 brings professionalism, accountability and transparency to the New Orleans area levee board system. Hurricane Katrina taught us that our levees are far too important to be used as political spoils.

## 2008 Activities

In April, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans alerted and mobilized the New Orleans legislative delegation to defeat House Bill 712, which would have stripped the Southeast Levee Flood Protection Authority of royalty revenue in Plaquemines Parish.

# Tax Assessor Consolidation and Reform

AS NEW ORLEANS contemplated the challenge of a massive recovery following the 2005 disaster, issues related to local property valuations came into focus. For years debate had raged over the local system of assessing property taxes. Critics had long assailed the system as being unfair and rife with political patronage.

The system operated through seven separate assessor offices, each run by an individual who was elected by local voters and was not necessarily adequately qualified for the job. It became clear in post-Katrina New Orleans that local property assessments were so flawed that they were worthless in valuing damages done by the storm and flood.

Members of Citizens for 1 realized that a newly engaged citizenry presented an opportunity to change the entrenched property assessment system. The organization put out a public call for assessor reform legislation that would consolidate the seven assessor offices into one and require a uniform method of assessment.

The organization worked directly with lawmakers to get a bill introduced and placed before the Legislature. Then, members of Citizens for 1 spent weeks in the state capital and attended every legislative session while the bill was under debate. Finally, the measure passed. Because its implementation required amending the state constitution, the next challenge was to build voter support for the change.



Citizens for 1 raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund a public education effort that asked “Why pay seven to do the job of one?” The organization mounted a statewide campaign behind the constitutional amendment, and delivered the message through campaign literature, advertisements, and radio and television spots. Members of Citizens for 1 carried the message to diverse organizations at the local and state levels, including community groups, neighborhood associations and churches.

The result: Amendment No. 7 was approved by 78 percent of voters statewide and 68 percent of New Orleans voters. The vote was hailed for garnering support among groups that had historically opposed such a change. The amendment will go into effect in 2010.

# Public Education and Recognition, 2008

IN ADDITION to participating directly in planning, lobbying and get-out-the-vote efforts, Citizens for 1 members advocate for various causes by hosting meetings, making public appearances and raising the profile of the organization in the community. Here are some of the activities the organization has participated in recently.

## **PUBLIC EVENTS**

- Citizens for 1 hosted a luncheon for more than 100 people to highlight the organization's work. The featured guest speaker was Pamela Tyler, author of "Silk Stockings and the Ballot Box."

## **APPEARANCES, PRESENTATIONS**

- A representative of Citizens for 1 attended the inauguration of Gov. Bobby Jindal.
- A representative of Citizens for 1 made a presentation to the Junior League Area V presidents.
- The Crime and Criminal Justice Committee chair represented Citizens for 1 at a meeting of the Washington Press Club.
- The Citizens for 1 chair made a presentation before Leadership Birmingham, at their request, and as a result that group formed "Together Birmingham," modeled after Citizens for 1.
- Representatives of Citizens for 1 attended the Democratic National Convention. (Hurricane Gustav prevented attendance at the Republican National Convention.)

## **RECOGNITION**

- The Citizens for 1 chair received, in behalf of the organization, a Doctor of Humane Letters honorary degree from Loyola University of New Orleans.
- Citizens for 1 was designated a "Hero of the Storm" by the Washington, D.C.-based Friends of New Orleans and was invited to attend both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions to help showcase New Orleans.
- Citizens for 1 was honored as Role Model by the Young Leadership Council.
- The Citizens for 1 chair was honored for volunteerism by St. Charles Avenue Magazine.

# Coalition Partners

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans has worked in coalition with many other organizations, which have taken leadership roles on major local issues. They include:

After School Partnership  
Alliance for Good Government — Orleans,  
Jefferson, St. Bernard, St. Tammany  
Arab American Antidiscrimination Committee  
Audubon Street Neighborhood Association  
Baptist Community Ministries  
Baronne Street Neighborhood Association  
Beacon of Hope  
Bridge House  
Broadmoor Improvement Association  
Bureau of Governmental Research  
Business Council New Orleans and  
the River Region  
Center for Development and Learning  
Committee of 100 Black Men  
Common Good  
Council for a Better Louisiana  
Court Watch NOLA  
Crimestoppers  
EbonetWorks  
Feliciana Chamber of Commerce  
Fontainebleau Improvement Association  
Greater New Orleans School Partnership  
Greater New Orleans Inc.  
Holy Cross Neighborhood Association  
Homebuilders Association of Greater  
New Orleans  
Horizon Initiative  
Jefferson Business Council  
Jefferson Chamber of Commerce  
Jesuit Research Institute  
Junior League of New Orleans Inc.  
Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative  
Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana  
Kiwanis Club of Calcasieu  
LA Ethics 1  
League of Women Voters  
LeveeReform.com  
Levees.Org  
Living Witness Ministries  
Louisiana Asian Chamber of Commerce  
Louisiana Association of Business and  
Industry  
Louisiana Charter Schools  
Louisiana Chemical Association  
Louisiana Leadership Initiative  
Louisiana Realtors Association  
Louisiana Restaurant Association  
Mary, Queen of Vietnam Parish  
Metropolitan Crime Commission, New Orleans  
National Council of Jewish Women  
New Orleans Section  
New Leaders for New Schools  
New Orleans Chamber of Commerce  
New Orleans Convention and  
Visitors Bureau  
New Orleans Crime Coalition  
New Orleans Metropolitan Association  
of Realtors  
New Orleans Police and Justice  
Foundation  
New Orleans Regional Black Chamber  
of Commerce  
New Schools for New Orleans  
Northshore Business Council  
Odyssey House  
Palmer Avenue Neighborhood Association  
Public Affairs Research Council  
Puentes Inc.  
Recovery School District  
Sabine Parish Chamber of Commerce  
Safe Streets Strong Communities  
Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education  
Initiatives at Tulane University  
Shared Hope  
Silence is Violence  
Slidell Chamber of Commerce  
St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce  
Teach for America  
Teach NOLA  
Urban League of Greater New Orleans  
Women for a Better Louisiana  
Women of the Storm  
World Trade Center of New Orleans  
Young Leadership Council

