

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONS  
Secretary Gary Westcott



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## **Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women Held Graduation Ceremony** *Female inmates conquered odds to receive certifications, diplomas and degrees*

Baton Rouge, LA - The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections is proud to announce that 49 women who are incarcerated at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) received either a certificate, diploma or degree from various accredited programs. The Class of 2025 graduation ceremony occurred Thursday, Oct. 30 at 12:30 p.m. inside the LCIW gymnasium at the newly constructed correctional facility in St. Gabriel.

Considered as a graduation ceremony of firsts, roughly 72 honors were awarded to women who range in age from 22 to 69, who have successfully conquered numerous odds to further their education. The event celebrated the accomplishments and conferring of 14 graduates at the collegiate level. Thirteen women received their Bachelor of Arts in Social Science, all with honors, from the Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA). Two women obtained degrees from Ashland University, one with an Associate of Arts in General Studies and another with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications.

Roughly 23 women earned a High School Equivalency Test (HiSet) diploma. Numerous women received a career and technical education certification (CTE). This year's breakdown included 13 certificates in welding, three in horticulture, six in medical lab assistance, eight in furniture restoration, and five in heavy equipment. There was one participant who completed the Blackstone accredited Paralegal Certificate program. Six women completed the literacy program and one finished the adult basic education (ABE) program.

More than 568 industry-based certifications, commonly referred to as IBCs were also earned. An IBC is a credential that verifies an individual's knowledge and skills against a specific set of industry standards, which helps make them more competitive in the job market when they reenter the community and helps lower recidivism.

"We are very proud of what our graduates have accomplished in the classroom," said Kristen Thomas, warden, Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. "Our staff of educators and correctional professionals, along with a number of community partners have worked diligently to offer instructional assistance that has helped to put these ladies on an educational pathway that can ultimately change their life trajectory."

While each program has its own set of requirements, all programs have minimal testing standards. Graduates can use their newly earned skills, certifications and education to gain employment upon release and reentry back into the community. If a graduate is not slated for release, their skills can be utilized within the facility.

"The graduation ceremony is a reflection of the long hours, hard work, and determination that has created a desire for these ladies to grow and change, said Holly Shoemake, education director, Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. "Being able to witness some of the women learn how to read is impactful and life changing for them."

The three class valedictorians gave moving speeches to a gym full of family, friends and other women who are incarcerated at the correctional facility. While the graduation ceremony was not open to the public, the graduates were allowed to invite up to three guests from their approved visitation list to share in the milestone achievement. Also in attendance were community partners and officials from Operation Restoration, Tulane University, Ashland University, and leadership from the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections.

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