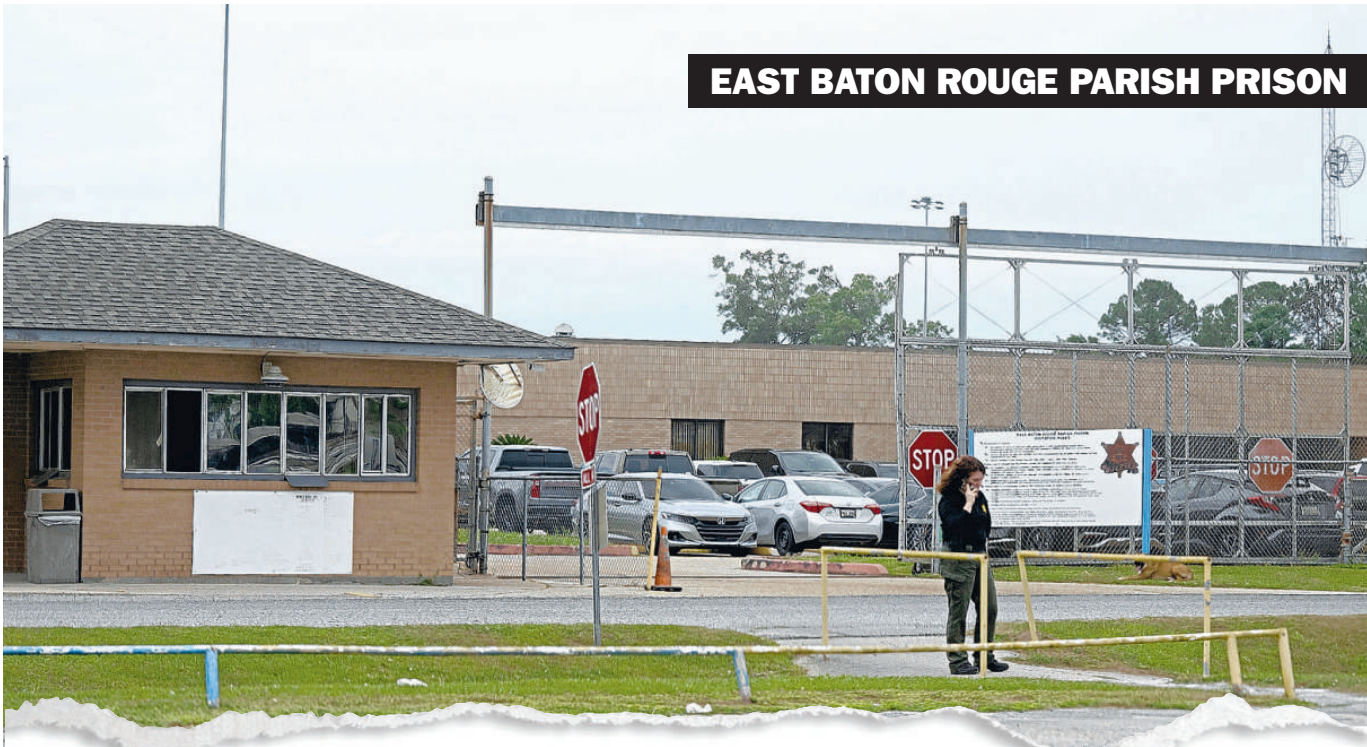




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Jailed teens at center of dispute in EBR

Facilities disagree where young inmates will be housed

BY GABBY JIMENEZ
Staff writer

A new law that will treat all 17-year-olds charged with crimes as adults has sparked disagreement between Baton Rouge officials about whether the teens should be moved to the parish prison or remain in the beleaguered juvenile jail. Seventeen-year-old offenders have been funneled into the juvenile justice system since a law known as "Raise the Age" was passed in 2019. But some Louisiana Republicans have identified the law as a contributing factor in a spike of violent juvenile crime following the COVID-19 pandemic. Before Raise the Age,

17-year-olds were sent to the adult system regardless of the severity of the crime. A bill to undo the 2019 law, authored by state Sen. Heather Cloud, R-Turkey Creek, was presented as a way to crack down on juvenile crime. But critics said harsher punishments would do little to prevent crimes from occurring and would disproportionately impact Black youth, who make up a larger share of the prison population. Gov. Jeff Landry signed the legislation into law in March as Act No. 13, and it goes into effect Friday. In a faxed letter sent to Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome and Metro Council members Tuesday, East Baton

Rouge Parish Sheriff Sid Gautreaux asserts the parish prison is unable to house 17-year-olds. According to Gautreaux, under the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, the prison does not meet the minimum national standards for housing 17-year-old offenders. The act, which was established to prevent and eliminate sexual assault and rape in correctional systems, requires "youthful inmates" — any person younger than 18 — be housed completely separate from adult inmates. "The East Baton Rouge Parish Prison in its current state cannot safely and

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BR rapper's Utah charges detailed

NBA Youngboy accused of participating in drug fraud ring

BY PATRICK SLOAN-TURNER
Staff writer

A Baton Rouge judge ordered local rapper NBA Youngboy into federal custody Thursday after he was arrested Tuesday in Utah, accused of participating in a "large-scale prescription fraud ring." Youngboy, whose real name is Kentrell Gauden, was already out on bond as he faced weapon

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STAFF FILE PHOTO BY HILARY SCHEINUK
Rep. Roger Wilder, R-Denham Springs, said he sponsored a bill ending lunch breaks for child workers because children want to work without having to take lunch breaks.

House panel OKs labor legislation

Measures would cut jobless benefits, end lunch breaks for child workers

BY JAMES FINN
Staff writer

A Louisiana House committee voted Thursday to repeal a law requiring employers to give child workers lunch breaks and to cut unemployment benefits — part of a push by Republi-

cans to remove constraints on employers and reduce aid for injured and unemployed workers. The House Labor and Industrial Relations panel advanced the child labor legislation, House Bill 156, along with other measures. ► See **LABOR**, page 5A

Judge switches verdict on ex-BRPD officer

Issues not guilty ruling, and says she was 'in error'

BY MATT BRUCE
Staff writer

Twenty-three days after she found former Baton Rouge police Officer Donald Steele Jr. guilty of a "misdemeanor grade" of malfeasance in office, District Judge Eboni Johnson Rose admitted Thursday that she made a mistake in her original ruling and rendered a new verdict: not guilty.

Steele had no comment as he walked out of the courthouse afterward as a free man.

Prosecutors said they plan to file a writ to the 1st Circuit Court of Appeal by June 10, challenging the judge's new ruling.

Assistant District Attorney Dana Cummings, who led the state's prosecution during Steele's trial last month, appeared stunned by the change in outcome.



Steele

"I am shocked. She changed a verdict that she legally rendered and filed into the court record," Cummings said just outside the courtroom. "There is a record of the verdict that she filed in this case."

Authorities alleged Steele, 37, solicited sex from a 19-year-old Southern University college student during a traffic stop early the morning of June 23, 2021. He was tried for second-degree kidnapping and felony malfeasance in office.

Johnson Rose presided over a two-day bench trial and acquitted the former officer of second-degree kidnapping. She declared him guilty of a lesser misdemeanor malfeasance charge in her March 26 verdict.

But state law does not include a misdemeanor variant of malfeasance in office, and attorneys from both sides met with the judge in her chambers the day after the trial ended to review her mixed verdict. Johnson Rose ordered prosecutors and Steele's legal team to file motions making

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