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FROM: Ruth Blanco
RE: “Better Know a Jail” Memo
DATE: November 26, 2019

Acadia Parish Jail Memorandum

Introduction

Acadia Parish encompasses 655.3 square miles of the southwestern part of Louisiana.¹ After the state of Louisiana voted to create Acadia Parish, another election was held shortly after to determine the first officer in the parish. In 1887, Elridge W. Lyons went on to become the first sheriff of Acadia.² Today, the Acadia Parish Sheriff’s Office (APSO) prides itself in its mission to provide responsible, effective and efficient law enforcement services with integrity and fairness to all citizens of Acadia Parish.³ The Acadia Parish Jail belongs to the corrections division of APSO and is under the supervision of Warden Laura Benoit.

Jail Characteristics

The Acadia Parish Jail is a minimum-security facility located on 1037 Capitol Avenue, Crowley, Louisiana 70526 in Acadia Parish. It houses male and female inmates.⁴ This facility holds pre-trial inmates, inmates awaiting sentencing, and inmates who have been sentenced.⁵ This jail has direct supervision; correctional officers interact with inmates regularly. The APSO Corrections Facility has a capacity of 190 beds.⁶ The average daily population estimates since 2014 exceed the maximum capacity of 190 inmates. In 2014, APSO estimated the average daily population as 266 inmates. In the following year, 2015, APSO estimated the average daily population as 288 inmates. In 2016, APSO estimated the average daily population as 190 inmates, which is supposed to be the facility’s maximum capacity. In 2018, APSO estimated the average daily population as 280 inmates. On November 21, 2019 at 11:00 pm (CST), according to APSO’s live jail database there were 176 inmates in the facility. Although the averages reported in previous years are pure estimates, the averages show a trend that indicate that the facility tends to reach, and sometimes surpass inmate capacity.

The live jail database can be accessed from APSO’s main website at www.apso.org. On the right-hand side of the website there is a section titled “Popular Links” and the option is “Jail Population”. The link will redirect you to the live jail database which lets you do a search by name and year of birth, by viewing all incarcerated persons or recent bookings. Majority of inmates held at his facility are held short-term; however, there are inmates who have been housed in this facility as far back as May 2014. Inmates who have been incarcerated in this

¹ <https://louisianastudies.louisiana.edu/node/64>

² Fontenot, Mary. *Acadia Parish, Louisiana*. The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1976, p. 298.

³ <http://www.apso.org/about-us.html>

⁴ <http://jades.apso.org:8888/>

⁵ Phone Call with Sheriff’s Office on November 22, 2019 at 2:30 pm (CST).

⁶ <http://www.apso.org/corrections.html> Note: Although the website officially states it has a capacity of 190 beds, the 2018 Annual Report states that the facility has a capacity of 180 beds.

http://users.neo.registeredsite.com/1/7/9/18505971/assets/2018_AR_AllPages_PDF.pdf

facility for longer periods of time are facing charges such as first-degree murder, first-degree rape, second-degree murder, aggravated kidnapping etc.

Visitation depends on the inmate and where they are being held in the jail. Typically, the jail has visitation times Monday to Friday from 9 am to 6 pm. To deposit to an inmate's commissary, it may be done by phone, online, walk-in retail, MoneyGram, and their newly added access to the JailFunds app. The JailFunds app further facilitates phone deposits and allows inmate video visitations to occur.

Public Record Requests and Inmate Mortality

APSO's website is easy to maneuver. On the left-hand side of the website there is an option that says "Divisions", which then lists the different divisions in APSO: Administration, Enforcement, Corrections, Civil & Tax, and Traffic & Bonds. Public records are typically requested by the administrative division of a facility. The APSO Administration Division page lists the Sheriff, the Chief Criminal Deputy, Compliance Unit, Chief Financial Officer and Human Resources. Under the Compliance Unit, it clearly states "For all public records request, please contact the Compliance Unit directly."⁷ Both a phone number and email address are displayed for anyone (who is not incarcerated) to make a public record request.

Initially I experienced delayed with my public record request. I mailed my public record request addressed to the warden of the facility on August 28, 2019. On September 5, 2019, I received a call from Lt. Bart Habetz confirming that they received my request; however, I did not follow up and I did not receive any documents.

After I realized that the APSO had instructions on their website on how to make a public record request, I emailed Lt. Bart Habetz at bart.habetz@apso.org a new public record request. Lt. Habetz called me the following day confirming that he received my request and would send the documents by email. Shortly after my call with Lt. Habetz, I received an email with CJ-9's from 2014 to 2019 per my request. The CJ-9 is a form that jail facilities must complete to report any deaths of inmates under the facility's custody.⁸ My experience with APSO was pleasant in comparison with other facilities I had to work with for the same information. APSO was the only facility that at the very least mentioned public record requests.

Based on the CJ-9's APSO provided, from 2014 to 2019, four (4) inmates have died while under APSO's custody:

- 1) On April 2, 2017, a 52-year-old male inmate by the name of Thomas Verdin born on November 21, 1964 who was admitted on March 30, 2017 died while in custody of APSO. The inmate was being held for Rayne Police Department for a warrant. He was placed in general housing. According to the CJ-9, his cause of death was heart disease (atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease); the report states that this was a pre-existing medical condition and he was given his medication while in custody.⁹

⁷ <http://www.apso.org/administration.html>

⁸ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/09/12/2018-19802/agency-information-collection-activities-proposed-ecollection-ecomments-requested-extension-of-a>

⁹ Form CJ-9, Deaths in Custody – 2017

- 2) On November 29, 2017, a 32-year-old female inmate by the name of Jacilyn Thibodeaux born on October 15, 1985 who was admitted on that same day (November 25, 2019) died while in custody of APSO. The inmate was placed in a segregation unit. Her cause of death was multi substance intoxication.¹⁰
- 3) On August 20, 2019, a 38-year-old male inmate by the name of Rocky T. Chaney born on June 24, 1981 who was admitted on August 2, 2019 died while in custody of APSO. The inmate was housed in a segregation unit. His cause of death is yet to be determined.¹¹
- 4) On October 2, 2019, a 35-year-old female inmate by the name of Misty Carvell born on July 21, 1984 who was admitted on September 30, 2019 died while in custody of APSO. The inmate was housed in a segregation unit. Her cause of death was ruled a suicide by hanging/strangulation.¹²

I noticed two (2) trends between the four (4) fatalities: (1) Three of out of the four deaths in this facility were inmates who were placed in a segregation unit and (2) three out of the four deaths in this facility occurred within four (4) days of being admitted to this facility. However, the Acadia Parish Jail has not received any complaints on the jail conditions in the last five (5) years.

Jail Leadership

Sheriff K.P. Gibson is the Acadia Parish Sheriff and Ex-Officio Tax Collector. He was elected sheriff on October 25, 2015 and was sworn in on June 24, 2016 by Judge David Smith at the Acadia Parish Courthouse.¹³ Sheriff K.P. Gibson is the parish's 8th sheriff in over 130 years.

Sheriff K.P. Gibson started off his career as a patrolman in Lafayette in 1991 with the Lafayette Police Department. He served as a field training officer in the Field Training Officer Program and as an investigator in the Criminal Investigations Division. Then, Sheriff K.P. Gibson became the hostage negotiator for the department's SWAT team. When he decided to move to Crowley and was elected Chief of Police in 2002.¹⁴

Jail News Coverage and Oversight

In January 2015, an Acadia Parish Detention Center employee, Lester J. Landry was arrested on allegations of smuggling drugs, tobacco products, and cell phones to inmates.¹⁵

In December 2018, an Acadia Parish deputy, Reginal Senegal was arrested for allegedly bringing in a cellphone, tobacco products and other contraband into the Acadia Parish Jail and providing them to inmates.¹⁶

¹⁰ Form CJ-9, Deaths in Custody – 2017

¹¹ Form CJ-9, Deaths in Custody – 2019

¹² Form CJ-9, Deaths in Custody – 2019

¹³ <https://archive.acadiaparishtoday.com/news-local/sheriff-gibson>

¹⁴ <https://www.govserv.org/US/Crowley/1657415011156520/Acadia-Parish-Sheriff%27s-Office>

¹⁵ https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/crime_police/article_ccd06c9f-97ac-5ffa-a70f-7c8d7c205725.html

¹⁶ <https://kadn.com/apso-former-deputy-arrested-for-allegedly-bringing-contraband-into-the-parish-jail/>

APSO is audited by the state's Legislative Auditor's Office. In 2016, the former spokesperson for APSO, Maxine Trahan, was arrested for embezzling nearly \$200,000. According to the audit investigation, she was pocketing cash seized from suspected criminals for 13 years, from 2003 to 2016.¹⁷ The state's Legislative Auditor's Office is responsible for auditing APSO's annual financial report.¹⁸ The state's Legislative Auditor's Office website makes these reports available for the public.¹⁹

The Louisiana Department of Corrections does not have any oversight on the Acadia Parish Jail because it is a local jail that is not owned by the Department of Corrections. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) under the United States Department of Justice requires APSO to submit CJ-9's every year. Further, the BJS is responsible for data collection and surveys of local jails, including Acadia Parish Jail.²⁰

The Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement (LCLE) sets the requirements for training through the Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) for APSO.²¹

¹⁷ https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/article_cc9e0e16-e1ab-11e6-98c1-435363f33a81.html

¹⁸ [https://www.la.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/6E84B27396FB2E798625836F005CCE91/\\$FILE/0001B296.pdf](https://www.la.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/6E84B27396FB2E798625836F005CCE91/$FILE/0001B296.pdf)

¹⁹ <https://www.la.la.gov/reports-data/audit/parish-audit/index.shtml#Acadia>

²⁰ <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=12>

²¹ http://users.neo.registeredsite.com/1/7/9/18505971/assets/2018_AR_AllPages_PDF.pdf