

St. James Parish Jail

Jail Characteristics

St. James Parish Prison is in St. James Parish, and the address is 5800 Louisiana Highway 44, Convent, LA, 70723.¹ The website for the jail can be found at <https://stjamessheriff.com/about-us/divisions/corrections/>.² The parish is home to around 19,000 residents³, and is situated between New Orleans and Baton Rouge on the Mississippi river.⁴ The parish contains two towns: Gramercy and Litcher.⁵ The community is rural, is known for having “the richest soil in Louisiana.”⁶ This prison is the only adult jail/prison in the county; therefore, it serves the entire parish.⁷

The prison has a 171-bed capacity.⁸ Most inmates are pre-trial detainees or awaiting sentencing.⁹ The prison does not house juveniles.¹⁰ It is classified as a medium security facility and houses both males and females.¹¹ As of today, there are only 79 inmates incarcerated at the parish prison.¹² 11 identify as female¹³, and the remaining 68 identify as male.¹⁴ 57 are African American, 21 are white, and one is not specified.¹⁵ The charges range from violation of probation to murder.

The Prison is under the supervision of the St. James Parish County Sheriff’s Office.¹⁶ The sheriff serves a four-year term as the chief executive officer of the law enforcement district and ex-officio tax collector of the parish.¹⁷ The current sheriff is Willy J. Martin Jr.¹⁸ He was sworn in for his eighth consecutive term in office in July of 2020.¹⁹ He took office in 1992 and has served

¹ ST. JAMES PARISH SHERIFF’S OFFICE, <https://stjamessheriff.com> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022).

² *Id.*

³ St. James Parish, Louisiana:

Louisiana <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stjamesparishlouisiana,LA/PST045221> (last visited Nov. 27, 2022)

⁴ Community, <https://www.stjamesla.com/31/Community> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ St. James Parish Prison, LA Inmate Search, mugshots, Prison Roster, <https://oxfordvillagepolice.org/louisiana/county-jail/st-james-parish-prison/> (last modified Oct. 29, 2022). This website, although a secondary source, was the only website I could find that provided basic information about the prison

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Public Safety Suite Pro, <https://stjames-so-la.zuercherportal.com/#/inmates> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ ST. JAMES PARISH SHERIFF’S OFFICE, <https://stjamessheriff.com> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022).

¹⁷ St. James Parish Sheriff, Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC, [https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/\\$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098) (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ News Examiner-Enterprise, *Sheriff Willy Martin, Jr. Begins Eighth Term as Parish’s Top Law Enforcer*, <https://www.stjamesparishtoday.com/news/sheriff-willy-martin-jr-begins-eighth-term-parish’s-top-law-enforcer>

the people of St. James Parish ever since.²⁰ He is one of the two longest-serving sheriffs in Louisiana.²¹ He is not sure if he will serve another four years after his current term, but he believes there have been changes within the parish since he started. “I have always remained steadfast in making changes when I think they are necessary, and I have always said this job was never a power trip for me.”, stated Martin.²² The current warden is Capt. Anthony Joseph, who was promoted to a prison warden in 2020.²³ Lt. Latanya Sterling was promoted to the assistant warden in 2020.²⁴ Additionally, Lt. Keith Guerin was promoted to associate warden in 2019.²⁵

With budgeting, the sheriff’s office seems to be financially independent. The Sheriff has sole responsibility for budgeting, deficits, and the receipt and disbursement of funds.²⁶ However, I could not find an annual budget report solely for the sheriff’s office. Despite that, I found a budget report by the parish that included the cost for the jail under a section called “public safety.”²⁷ According to the “St. James Parish Year 2021 Budget” report, public safety is one of the Parish’s three most significant functions.²⁸ \$452,300 was the 2020 proposed budget for prisoner care under the public safety fund.²⁹ Included in this prisoner care fund were medical fees, feeding/maintaining prisoners, prisoner transportation, and etc.³⁰ This budget was amended to \$452,000, which was a 9.91% change from the original budget.³¹ According to the parish report, the “2020 Actual YTC as of 12/03/2020” would be \$346,736 for prisoner care.³²

Thus, information is not widely apparent when it comes to jail characteristics. It involves research beyond the sheriff’s website. The sheriff’s website is not very helpful regarding the jail, so I do not consider it very transparent in this regard.

Evidence of oversight

The prison does not have any known accreditation information available. I looked for any mention of accreditation on the website, annual reports, or social media. However, in a 2018 annual report, the sheriff stated, “The St. James Parish Correctional Facility undergoes an annual inspection and meets or exceeds American Correctional Association standards.”³³ Yet, the prison

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ St. James Parish Sheriff’s Office Annual Report 2020, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/stjames20.pdf> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ St. James Parish Sheriff’s Office Annual Report 2019, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/stjames19.pdf> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

²⁶ James Parish Sheriff, Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC, [https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/\\$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098) p. 16 (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

²⁷ St. James Parish Year 2021 Budget, <https://www.stjamesla.com/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/95> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.* at C-27-28

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ St. James Parish Sheriff’s Office Annual Report 2018, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/stjames18.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2022)

is not listed as an accredited facility on the ACA website.³⁴ Additionally, officers within the sheriff's office participate in a training program that The National Command and Staff College oversee.³⁵

When it comes to oversight, it seems like the jail is very independent. The parish does not oversee operations at the prison; this is left to the sheriff's office. In a parish audit report, it stated:

"Considered in the determinations of component units of the St. James Parish reporting entity were the St. James Parish School Board, St. James Parish Assessor, St. James Parish Sheriff, St. James Clerk of Court, and the various municipalities in the Parish. It was determined that these governmental entities are not component units of the St. James Parish reporting entity. All are governed by independently elected officials. The Parish oversight unit neither appoints their governing Boards nor designates management. Furthermore, the Parish has no ability to significantly influence operations, nor does it have any accountability for fiscal matters of the entities. They are considered by the Parish to be separate autonomous governments and issue financial statements separate from those of the St. James Parish reporting entity."³⁶

This statement clearly shows that oversight operations are managed by elected officials within the sheriff's office.

The LA legislative Auditor audited the Sheriff's office in November of 2021. The only mention of money for jail operations was under "Prisoner feeding and maintenance."³⁷ The actual cost incurred for this in 2020 amounted to \$204,048.³⁸ The audit report differed from the parish's proposed budget in different ways. First, the parish report was very detailed about the prison expenses. For example, in the parish's proposed budget, the cost of prisoner care included medical and dental expenses.³⁹ However, the audit report mentioned dental and vision services under public safety but did not specify if this was related to inmate care.⁴⁰ Thus, it seems like the parish proposed budget is more transparent than the sheriff's audit. Second, the proposed budget for 2020 in the

³⁴Accredited Facilities, American Correctional Association, https://www.aca.org/ACA/ACA_Member/Standards_and_Accreditation/SAC_AccFacHome.aspx?WebsiteKey=139f6b09-e150-4c56-9c66-284b92f21e51&hkey=f53cf206-2285-490e-98b7-66b5ecf4927a&5940f470ebf4=2#5940f470ebf4 (last visited Nov. 27, 2022)

³⁵ St. James Parish Sheriff's Office Annual Report 2020, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/stjames20.pdf> (last visited Nov. 27, 2022)

³⁶ St. James Parish Government, Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, <https://www.stjamesla.com/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/102> p. 2 (last visited Nov. 27, 2022)

³⁷James Parish Sheriff, Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC, [https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/\\$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098) p. 48 (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

³⁸ *Id*

³⁹ St. James Parish Year 2021 Budget, <https://www.stjamesla.com/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/95> C-27 (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

⁴⁰James Parish Sheriff, Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC, [https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/\\$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098) p. 48 (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

parish report was substantially different than the money spent on prisoners in the audit report. In the parish report, the sheriff's "2020 Actual YTD as of 12/03/2020" for prisoner care was \$346,736.⁴¹ According to the audit, the actual cost for 2020 was \$204,048.⁴² This difference is over \$100,000. One possible explanation can be the vagueness of the audit report. The audit report was not as detailed as the parish budget report; therefore, it can be said that the cost within the difference went towards other numbers within the audit report.

Additionally, there have been no judicial orders or consent decrees within the past five years. Thus, the prison is not transparent regarding oversight. The lack of accreditations and different cost numbers show that the public does not have a clear sight of what is happening in the sheriff's office and prison.

Evidence of Transparency

The sheriff's office seems to have a lot of transparency regarding public briefings about the prison operations. The office releases annual reports about significant changes within the sheriff's office that year. I found yearly reports for every year going back to 2003. However, the reports go further back than that; this was just the year they started to post the reports on their websites. For example, the announcements contain things like bookings into parish jail, training retirements, promotions, calls for assistance, awards, updates on jail security, crime stoppers news, courtroom safety, updated technology, updated weapons used by officers, drug and DWI arrest, summer youth camps, self-defense classes, and responses after major hurricanes.

For instance, in 2006, the annual report covered the jails' updated security. The new system allowed staff to control the jail's cameras remotely.⁴³ This feature allowed staff to zoom in or move the cameras for a better view.⁴⁴ The system cost the sheriff's office \$238,000.⁴⁵ In 2009, the report contained a section about courtroom safety. For violent criminals, the sheriff's office would attach a device to an inmate's ankle. They called it the "Band-it Prisoner Transport and Courtroom Control System."⁴⁶ The device was attached to an inmate's leg and delivered an eight-second electric shock if an inmate made a threatening move.⁴⁷ The shock would temporarily immobilize the prisoner until they could be removed from the courtroom.⁴⁸ In 2018, the jail had more upgrades to jail technology.⁴⁹ The sheriff introduced a new Internet-based system that allowed a doctor to

⁴¹ St. James Parish Year 2021 Budget, <https://www.stjamesla.com/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/95> C-28 (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

⁴² James Parish Sheriff, Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC, [https://app.la.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/\\$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.la.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/f0695592fc8b854d862587b2006a0717/$file/000255e2.pdf?openelement&.7773098) p. 48 (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

⁴³ St. James Parish Sheriff's Office Annual Report 2006, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/stjames06.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2022)

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ St. James Parish Sheriff's Office Annual Report 2009, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/stjames09.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2022)

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ St. James Parish Sheriff's Office Annual Report 2018, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/stjames18.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2022)

assess a prisoner's heart/respiration/blood pressure remotely to diagnose ailments and prescribe medication.”⁵⁰ Finally, in 2020, the jail announced implementing safeguards within the jail to combat the coronavirus.⁵¹

The availability of data on the people inside provides the public with good insight into the inmates. The inmate locator link is available on the sheriff's website. You can look up an inmate by name, race, sex, or arrest date. The locator provides the viewer with information about the inmate's age, the alleged crime, and bond information.⁵² For example, the system lists the charge and the article number for the particular crime.⁵³ Additionally, it provides information about which department is holding the inmate.⁵⁴ The locator was very helpful in gaining information about the overall population of the inmates, as I was able to see how many inmates were present and their demographics.

There is no information about reports or research by an advocacy group. However, the jail is small and has a clean record for the past few years.

Overall, there is excellent evidence of transparency, as the sheriff's office keeps the community updated. In addition, it looks like the sheriff's office is trying to make the community aware that the inmates in prison are properly secured and monitored. Although this is great oversight, it seems like the primary purpose is reassurance for the community, not the inmates.

Number of Deaths since 2014 and trends

From 2014-present, there was only one death reported in the prison.⁵⁵ In 2021, Carl McKinley died while in custody at the parish prison.⁵⁶ He died on September 10, 2021, at University Medical Center New Orleans.⁵⁷ His cause of death was listed as the coronavirus.⁵⁸ There does not seem to be a trend of deaths within this facility, as there was only one.

Filing the public records request was very quick and easy. I sent my request through email on August 29, 2022, and I received records on September 2, 2022. This prison was the first facility to send the records back. Based on prior public records reports and the absence of news articles, the prison seems transparent regarding death in the prison.

Notable cases or complaints on prison conditions in the last 5 years

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ St. James Parish Sheriff's Office Annual Report 2020, <https://stjamessheriff.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/stjames20.pdf> (last visited Nov. 27, 2022)

⁵² Public Safety Suite Pro, <https://stjames-so-la.zuercherportal.com/#/inmates> (last visited Nov. 29, 2022)

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ Death in Custody Reporting Act Fiscal Year 2021, *Form DCR-1A* (Sept. 2, 2022)

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/105c5A70Z4hEWpyQXWadXnXzEq9_qLjBH/edit#gid=1025423726

Finally, there are no recent cases or complaints against the jail. Although there are cases here and there against the sheriff for other issues, the prison has stayed out of trouble for the past five years.