

Brianna Walker
Professor Armstrong
Incarceration
29 November 2022

Assignment #3 Better Know a Jail: Union Parish Detention Center

Union Parish includes the towns of Bernice, Farmerville, and Marion, Louisiana, and is located in the Third Judicial District. According to the United States Census Bureau the estimated population of Union Parish in 2021 was around 21,000 people.¹ In 2020 the median household income was just above \$45,000. Additionally, the percentage of persons over the age of 24 with a bachelor's degree or higher was less than 20%. Caucasians make up about 70% of the population in Union Parish.

Union Parish Detention Center is located in northern Louisiana about 30 miles from the commonly known city of Monroe, Louisiana. The physical address of the detention center is 707 Rodeo Circle Farmerville, LA 71241. The Detention Center has been established since the early 1800s. Union Parish Detention Center is a minimal security level detention center and typically houses only adults. Currently, there is one juvenile who is being housed at Union Parish Detention Center, the provided reasoning being that he is being tried as an adult. The detention center can house around 387 inmates. Currently there are 377 inmates being housed at the Union Parish Detention Center, of which 120 are pretrial inmates and 257 are convicted inmates. The detention center now houses only male inmates.²

There is no active website for the Detention Center and thus, there is no online inmate index. If a family member wanted to check on the status of their loved one, they would have to call the detention center. Additionally, there is no longer an option for in-person visitation, all visitations must take place virtually. According to Warden Adams inmates have computer screens in each of the dorms equipped with a HomeWav video system for video visitation.

Since 2014 Union Parish Detention Center has had three inmates die while in custody. Two of which were in 2015, namely, Vernon Ramsey whose death was medical in nature, and James Moore whose death was accidental. More recently, Gavin Porter passed away after taking his life in 2020 while in custody at the Detention Center.³

Union Parish Detention Center does provide several programs to its inmates. The Louisiana Department of Corrections offers Parenting, Substance Abuse, Money Management, and Anger Management programs at Union Parish Detention Center. The Detention Center also offers a Work Release program. The requirements of which are that the inmate cannot have a violent criminal history in addition to having 5 years or less left to serve on their sentence. The inmates

¹ "United States Census Bureau: Quick Facts Union Parish Louisiana." Census.gov, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/unionparishlouisiana,LA/PST045221>.

² Phone Conversation with Captain Banks.

³ "Union." Incarceration Transparency, https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/?page_id=215.

are then trained and sent to work in an effort to have some financial safeguards and money saved up upon their release.⁴

The current sheriff is Dusty Gates. In 2013 Sheriff Gates assumed the position of interim sheriff after the death of longtime Sherriff Robert G. Buckley who was affectionally known as Sheriff Bob. In 2014 Gates ran for sheriff to complete the term and was elected. He ran for re-election unopposed in 2015 and most recently in 2019 having been elected both times.⁵

However, the sheriff's office is not in charge of supervising and overseeing Union Parish Detention Center. Under Louisiana Revised Statute 15 § 850.4 the Union Parish Detention Center Commission is the "keeper" of the Union Parish Detention Center, and the Sheriff of Union Parish is relieved of that duty in their official capacity.⁶

The Union Parish Detention Center Commission members include the president of the Union Parish Police Jury, one additional police juror, Union Parish Sheriff, District Attorney and the Farmerville Chief of Police. The current President of the Union Parish Police Jury is Johnny Buckley with Brenda Abercrombie as the Vice President. As mentioned above the Union Parish Sheriff is Dusty Gates and the District Attorney is John Belton. Bim Coulterston has been the Farmerville Chief of Police for several years. Essentially the Sheriff's office receives reports but does no formal oversight of the Detention Center and the Police Jury is in charge of its supervision.

In September of 2020 Donnie Adams was officially hired as Warden of Union Parish Detention Center although he had been acting warden since June of 2020.

After a brief conversation with Warden Adams, I was informed that Union Parish Detention Center does not have any accreditations. Annually the Louisiana Department of Corrections performs an audit of the Detention Center that typically takes place in the spring. In their most recent audit, the Detention Center passed the audit concerning overall jail guidelines and inspections. Warden Adams also informed me that there are no judicial orders or consent decrees in effect over the Detention Center. However, in March of 2018, The United States Department of Justice reached a settlement with the Union Parish Detention Center to resolve Americans with Disabilities Act Violations. The settlement agreement resolved a complaint made by an inmate with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) who was isolated in segregated housing for approximately six months because he had HIV. Staff also posted on the inmate's cell door for passing non-medical staff and other inmates alerting of his HIV status. Under the agreement, the Union Parish Detention Center was order to not segregate detainees in the future on the basis of their HIV status. The agreement also required the Union Parish Detention Center to adopt nondiscrimination policies, designate an ADA coordinator, establish an ADA complaint

⁴ Phone Conversation with Captain Banks

⁵ "About Our Sheriff." Union Parish Sheriff's Office, <https://unionsheriff.com/sheriff/>.

⁶ LA RS 15:850.4

procedure, and train all staff annually on HIV and nondiscrimination obligations. The Union Parish Detention Center also had to pay \$27,500 in damages to the complainant.⁷

In their 2022 Annual Operating Budget, the Union Parish Police Jury stated that as of November 2021 the Detention Center had \$700,260.43 in the bank and \$40,479.89 as a LAMP Investment (Louisiana Asset Management Pool, Inc.).⁸ LAMP is not insured or guaranteed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.⁹

Finding any public briefings on jail operations by jail officials or the city (when not in the wake of tragedy or some major event at the detention center that sparked media coverage) proved difficult. Further, there is limited availability of data on the people inside the detention center. There is no inmate locator because there is no website for the detention center. It seems like there was one in the past because several documents are linked to a website, however, the link is no longer in service.^{10 11} It should be noted however, that the Union Parish Police Jury presents virtually as an organized organization. I was impressed with the availability of their meeting minutes and agendas for each of their meetings. Most recently in their November 2022 Regular Meeting, the audit engagement to perform audits on the financials and AUPs for the Union Parish Police Jury and Union Parish Detention Center for the 2022 year passed unanimously.

There didn't appear to be any organized advocacy groups besides us doing research or really watchdogging the Union Parish Detention Center. There is however a local newspaper, *The Gazette*¹², that provides readers with coverage of the latest major incidents involving the detention center.

There have been several notable incidents at Union Parish Detention Center that the Gazette and even our local news has covered. Most recently in April of 2022 a multi-agency manhunt and investigation was initiated for a Union Parish work release inmate escapee who stabbed a co-worker at Foster Farms.¹³ Even more horrific, in 2018, an investigation was launched after a male inmate, a convicted rapist from Claiborne Parish, raped a 17-year-old after being allowed in an isolation cell where she was detoxing from methamphetamine. Demarcus Peyton, 28, of Homer, Louisiana, was charged with third-degree rape and according to the arrest affidavit, Peyton stated that after being read his Miranda rights Union Parish Detention Center staff opened the isolation cell door for him to enter and again when he got ready to leave. Peyton reported

⁷ "Justice Department Reaches Settlement with Union Parish Detention Center to Resolve ADA Violations." The United States Department of Justice, 22 Mar. 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-reaches-settlement-union-parish-detention-center-resolve-ada-violations>.

⁸ "Union Parish Police Jury 2022 Annual Operating Budget." Union Parish Police Jury, <https://uppj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Budget-Message.pdf>.

⁹ "Louisiana Asset Management Pool." LAMP, <https://www.lamppool.com/>.

¹⁰ <https://unionsheriff.com/unionparishdetentioncenter.htm>

¹¹ Warden Adams seemed unaware that the website was not functional.

¹² The Gazette is Union Parish's oldest newspaper. Farmerville Gazette, <https://www.fgazette.com/>.

¹³ Johnson, My Sherie, and Chelsea Monae Williams. "Update: Multi-Agency Manhunt Underway for Union Parish Work Release Escapee Accused of Killing Co-Worker at Foster Farms." WGNO, WGNO, 22 Apr. 2022, <https://wgno.com/news/update-multi-agency-manhunt-underway-for-union-parish-work-release-escapee-accused-of-killing-co-worker-at-foster-farms/>.

having sex twice with the victim while inside the cell.¹⁴ A few months later in July of 2018 The Gazette released the news that an investigation had been started into allegations that the then warden of the Union Parish Detention Center, Gary Copes, may have had inappropriate contact with a female inmate at the facility. ¹⁵

Before then, in 2005 Andrea Scott filed a petition against the Union Parish Detention center on 42:1983 Federal Questions grounds in reference to prison conditions. The petition was later dismissed without prejudice for what seems like inability to pay court cost.¹⁶ Later in 2005 Aaron Tarver petition the court for a writ of habeas corpus filed on September 22, 2005. Tarver was advised that his State and Federal sentences were to run concurrently and argued that he should have been release in June of 2005. Tarver had to go through in forma pauperis proceedings. By the time these proceeding were concluded, and Tarver granted financial relief, he was release from the detention center. As a result, his petition was denied on the grounds of mootness and dismissed with prejudice.¹⁷

In filing out my Public Records Request I was met with some formidable opposition. There is a law firm, Gold, Weems, Bruser, Sues and Rundell APLC, that handles the records and these types of requests for the parish. When I initially submitted my request, I was met with prompt assistance and the response that there were no records pertaining to my request. I asked for a letter of zero deaths or at least a confirmation that there has been zero deaths at the facility. The attorney for the Detention Center restated that there were no records and that she was not obligated to create anything for me. I waited some time and filed a new public records request requesting *any* paperwork of *any* incidents that resulted in death in the last five years. I was again told there were no records that matched my request. When I checked our website, incarcerationtransparency.org, I notice that there was a death within the 5 year period I requested any paperwork regarding. This information was obtained via the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections however. I am hoping to seek advice from Professor Armstrong on how to proceed because the attorney is telling me there is no record when I have record of a death at the facility.

¹⁴ Mustian, Jim. "In North Louisiana, a Story of a Troubled Jail, Alleged Rape and No Charges." NOLA.com, 8 Apr. 2018, https://www.nola.com/news/article_29945dac-f47b-5f22-842d-444ee4d90ce8.html.

¹⁵ "Detention Center Warden Under Investigation ." The Gazette, Facebook, 3 Jan. 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/thefgazette/posts/detention-center-warden-under-investigationan-investigation-has-been-started-int/1698010970254604/>.

¹⁶ *Andrea Scott v. Johnny Sumlin*, 2005

¹⁷ *Aaron Tarver v. Johnny Sumlin* 2005