

Vernon Parish Jail Memo: Tyler Rosen.
Address of Prison: 1203 S. 4th St, Leesville, 71446
Associated website: Vernon.lavns.org

Vernon Parish Correctional Facility was closed on March 31st, 2018 due to state budget cuts according to Sheriff Sam Craft.¹ The inmates and employees were moved to neighboring prisons determined on an individual basis. *Id.* However, Vernon Parish does have a jail within its jurisdiction, in which we will be obtaining records from the jail soon through Missy Hillman. Therefore, this memo will focus on Vernon Parish Jail.

Vernon Parish Jail houses 300 inmates and employs 75 staff members.² Interestingly, Vernon Parish Correctional Center housed a similar number of inmates.³ However, it is not clear how many inmates in Vernon Parish Jail came from the correctional facility. Sheriff John Sam Craft mentioned in an announcement that the inmates and employees would be relocated to “neighboring parishes.”⁴ The jail is located within the jurisdiction of Leesville city.⁵ The jail has a website, but it’s used to find the names of inmates incarcerated and the crime they committed.⁶ Sheriff John Sam Craft became sheriff of Vernon Parish Jail in 2000 and has maintained the position since. Sheriff Craft was not the Sheriff who is providing death records for Vernon Parish Jail.⁷ According to Louisiana’s Department of Correction’s website, Asa A. Skinner is the District Attorney and Jeffery K. Skidmore is the Clerk of the Court.⁸ It was Jeffery Skidmore who informed me that Missy Hillman would have access to death records from Vernon Parish Jail. Additionally, the jail was audited on June 30th, 2020.⁹ According to the audit, the jail obtained outside forms of revenue that exceeded projections, so the original budget of the jail was “amended.” *Id.* at 10. The audit says that the annual budget of the facility is \$231,820, but when accounting for “Variance” [\$178,060], the final budget is \$409,880. *Id.* at 37.

¹ Local News Article: [Sheriff: Vernon Correctional Facility to close March 31 \(kpletv.com\)](http://www.kpletv.com)

² Website Overviewing Various Prisons in the Country: [Vernon Parish Jail, LA Inmate Search, Visitation Hours \(nodeathpenalty.org\)](http://nodeathpenalty.org)

³ Same Local News Article in Footnote 1

⁴ Same Local News Article in Footnote 1

⁵ Google Maps

⁶ Vernon Parish Jail Website: [Vernon Parish Jail \(lavns.org\)](http://Vernon.lavns.org)

⁷ Louisiana Sheriff Association: [VERNON.PARISH \(lsa.org\)](http://VERNON.PARISH.lsa.org)

⁸ Louisiana Department of Corrections: [Vernon Parish - Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections](http://Vernon.Parish.Louisiana.Department.of.Public.Safety.&Corrections)

⁹ Audit of Vernon Parish Jail: [00023318.pdf \(la.gov\)](http://00023318.pdf)

In terms of oversight, it does not appear that there is any oversight over Vernon Parish Jail. We had records of deaths at Vernon Parish Correctional Facility back in 2014, but we've had difficulty receiving records from Vernon Parish Jail. Furthermore, Vernon Parish Jail does not appear to have accreditation by any national association. That includes no affiliation with the American Correctional Association,¹⁰ nor any affiliation with the National Commission on Correctional Health Care.¹¹ The jail was audited on June 30th, 2020, as mentioned previously.¹² However, neither Vernon Parish nor the City Council of Leesville have had a hearing pertaining to prison operations.¹³ I also could not find any Judicial Orders or consent decrees that have ever taken effect through public records via legal search engines.

Vernon Parish Jail does not appear to be transparent. There has been no public briefing on the jail. Louisiana's Department of Correction does list the contact information of Vernon Parish government officials on their website.¹⁴ However, none of the people listed on the website include a person who handles public records for the jail. *Id.* Most news articles that even mention Vernon Parish Jail usually focus on the criminal activity.¹⁵ There are easily dozen of articles about criminal activity around the parish, none detailing life in the jail at all. *Id.* It doesn't seem that anyone in the Parish is interested in reporting on anything going on in the jail. When we tried obtaining records from Vernon Parish Jail, they were uncooperative. When talking to one of the employees in the jail, the employee claimed that the jail didn't keep "those kinds of records." In the middle of that conversation, a sheriff took the phone and started talking with me directly. He told me that the court would have public records. Reaching out to the Court Clerk Jeffery C. Skidmore, he told me that it would be inaccurate to say that the local court would have those records, but to contact a different Sheriff, Missy Hillman. In the past, previous students had gotten the run around from Missy Hillman when emailing the Sheriff. However, when directly contacting her over the phone, she was more than happy to give us records. It took negotiation and some time, but eventually she was willing to give us records of deaths in the jail from 2014-2020. I got the impression that she was only willing to do those records because of the workload was easier.

¹⁰ American Correctional Association: [ER Cass Award Winners \(aca.org\)](https://www.aca.org)

¹¹ National Commission on Correctional Healthcare: [Agenda Center • Leesville, LA • CivicEngage \(leesvillela.gov\)](https://www.civicengage.com/leesville)

¹² Audit of Vernon Parish Jail: [00023318.pdf \(la.gov\)](https://www.civicengage.com/leesville)

¹³ Used City of Leesville Agenda Center. Website does not refer to any hearings prior to one year for some reason: [Agenda Center • Leesville, LA • CivicEngage \(leesvillela.gov\)](https://www.civicengage.com/leesville)

¹⁴ Louisiana Department of Corrections: [Vernon Parish - Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections](https://www.louisianadepartmentofcorrections.gov)

¹⁵ See generic Bing search for ANY news on Vernon Parish Jail: [newsarticle about vernon parish jail - Search \(bing.com\)](https://www.bing.com/search?q=news+article+about+vernon+parish+jail)

Finally, there do not seem to be any reported cases pertaining to Vernon Parish Jail within the last five years. Vernon Parish Correctional Facility has been closed for over five years at this point.¹⁶ However, it should be noted that two years before the facility had closed the facility was being sued in 2016. Briefly summarized, *Whitehead v. Vernon Parish Corr. Facilities*, an inmate had suffered serious medical complications due to Correctional Officers refusing to give him medical attention.¹⁷ The case was dismissed with prejudice. *Id.* While the case is seven years old, it's insightful that the correctional facility has had complaint of abuse two years before closing and having all the inmates and Correctional Officers relocated in "neighboring parishes."

We have not gotten records from Vernon Parish Jail yet, but we will be receiving them soon.

¹⁶ Local News Article: [Sheriff: Vernon Correctional Facility to close March 31 \(kplctv.com\)](#)

¹⁷ See Generally *Whitehead v. Vernon Parish Corr. Facility*, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 95572