

Lucy Butterbaugh  
Professor Armstrong and Kumar  
Incarceration Seminar  
29 November 2023

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Avoyelles Parish Women's Correctional Center**

### **Introduction**

Avoyelles Parish is one of sixty-four parishes (64) in Louisiana, founded in 1807. In central eastern Louisiana, the parish spans across 866 square miles.<sup>1</sup> As of July 1, 2022, Avoyelles parish had a population of over 38,00.<sup>2</sup> It is named for the Avoyel Indian tribe who resided there as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

The parish includes the cities of Bunkie, Center Point, Evergreen, Hessmer, Mansura, Marksville, Moreauville, Plaquemine, Simmesport, and Cottonport, where the Avoyelles Parish Women's Correctional Center is located.<sup>4</sup> Avoyelles Parish Women's Correctional Center was built in 1940.<sup>5</sup> It is operated by the corrections division of the Avoyelles Parish Sheriff's Department and is under the supervision of Warden Coretha Bonton.<sup>6</sup>

### **Jail Characteristics**

Avoyelles Parish Women's Correctional Center is a minimum-security facility located in Cottonport, Louisiana. From New Orleans, it is about a three-hour drive to the facility, located at 640 Choupique Lane, PO Box 340, Cottonport, La 71327. The facility is referred to as a "CD-3," a female detention center, and is managed by the Avoyelles Parish Sheriff's Department (APSO) and Avoyelles Parish Prison, overseen by Sheriff David L. Dauzat.<sup>7</sup> The facility houses inmates awaiting their court dates or sentencing, as well as those incarcerated for periods over a year in Avoyelles Parish County Jail. These inmates are accused or convicted of misdemeanor offenses in the parish, including first-time and non-violent offenders.

There is no official website for Avoyelles Women's Correctional Center, complicating the research process. Many inmate roster websites list a non-operational link at [www.corrections.state.la.us](http://www.corrections.state.la.us). Containing no additional information, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/avoyelles-womens-correctional-center-dc-3/> lists points of contact as well as a physical and mailing address. The Avoyelles Parish Sheriff's Office, whose website is <https://avoyelleso.com/corrections/>, has few specifics on the facility. It does say that the facility has a capacity of 300 inmates.<sup>8</sup> According to a 2021 report addressed to the Louisiana

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://archive.ph/20130830230055/http://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/docs/gazetteer/counties\\_list\\_22.txt#selection-9.1013-9.1089](https://archive.ph/20130830230055/http://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/docs/gazetteer/counties_list_22.txt#selection-9.1013-9.1089)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/avoyellesparishlouisiana,la,US/PST045218>

<sup>3</sup> <https://avoyellesparishclerkofcourt.com/>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://hcsheiff.org/louisiana/county-jail/avoyelles-parish-womens-correctional-center/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/avoyelles-womens-correctional-center-dc-3/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://avoyelleso.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://avoyelleso.com/corrections/>

Department of Corrections for budgeting purposes, the facility's operational capacity is 317, but had 225 vacancies at the end of that year between pre-trial detainees and DOC inmates.<sup>9</sup>

At the facility, inmates have several programs available to them. Vocational skills are taught in areas such as automotive technology and repair, culinary arts, construction, welding, and masonry.<sup>10</sup> Job skills include the Standardized Pre-release Curriculum and Office Systems.<sup>11</sup> There are value and faith-based programs that prepare women for success after their incarceration ends.<sup>12</sup> Other treatment programs available to women at the Avoyelles Women's Correctional Center include domestic abuse intervention, Living in Balance, LA Risk Management Model, Our Best Interest (Women), Partners in Parenting, Thinking for Change, and Understanding and Reducing Anger.<sup>13</sup>

Visitation is allowed from 7:30 am to 9 pm every weekday and from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm on the weekends, but visits must be booked in advance and approved.<sup>14</sup> Avoyelles Parish County reserves the right to investigate or search the visitor upon arrival.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, visitors must carry a photograph of the inmate they are visiting, dress appropriately, and provide a valid ID.<sup>16</sup> Children visiting must attend with an adult. Failure to comply with any of these requirements may result in the revocation of these privileges.<sup>17</sup>

### **Public Records Request and Inmate Mortality**

The Avoyelles Parish Clerk of Court website does not include a link or access to a Public Records Request form. In fact, it mostly contains information on the Clerk herself, Connie Desselle, then hyperlinks to other information.<sup>18</sup> A "search" of the website does not generate the form, either, and instead takes the person to a form database where day passes to access the records starts at \$25/day. A layperson would likely have difficulty making such a Public Records request.

Thanks to the former students of this Incarceration seminar, I knew to submit a Public Records Request of deaths in custody to Richard Ducote at APSO. Mr. Ducote is responsible for the Public Records of the Avoyelles Parish facilities. Mr. Ducote did not respond to my emails, but he reached out to me after receiving another request via fax. He provided me with "No Death" letters for the Women's Correctional Center, among others.

Based on the CJ-9's provided from the facility, from 2014 to 2023, there have been no deaths reported. I trusted these reports but verified by conducting web searches in the local news. I did not find any instances of death in custody at Avoyelles Women's Correctional Facility.

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://lcb.legis.la.gov/Docs/2021/jun/May%202021%20Corrections%20Act%201%20of%202020.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2016-Status-of-State-RS-15-1204-1B-2016-report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> <https://prisonroster.com/prisons/louisiana/county-jail/avoyelles-parish-womens-correctional-center/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://hcsheiff.org/louisiana/county-jail/avoyelles-parish-womens-correctional-center/>

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> <https://louisianaprisoneroster.org/louisiana/county-jail/avoyelles-parish-womens-correctional-center/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://avoyellesparishclerkofcourt.com/>

## **Jail Leadership**

The Avoyelles Parish Sheriff is David L. Dauzat. Sheriff Dauzat began his APSO term on July 1, 2020, after he prevailed over 3-time incumbent Douglas Anderson in the 2019 election.<sup>19</sup> Mr. Dauzat was re-elected in 2023, defeating multiple candidates, capturing 56 percent of the votes.<sup>20</sup>

The current Warden of the Avoyelles Women's Correctional Center is Coretha Bonton.<sup>21</sup> Searching for former wardens proved difficult and unsuccessful, as web searches—in the absence of an official website—yielded very little information.

What can be said about Warden Coretha Bonton is that an “anti-abuse” course emerged under her leadership at Avoyelles Women's Correctional Center back in October of 2015, kicking off Domestic Violence Awareness Month.<sup>22</sup> It was the first of its kind in the state and parish facilities, helping women to overcome the devastating effects of abusive relationships.<sup>23</sup> In her words to the first graduating class, Ms. Bonton echoed the facility's motto: Every woman can change.<sup>24</sup>

## **Jail News Coverage and Transparency**

In terms of notable complaints on the jail conditions in the last five years, I was unable to find anything of the sort. I was, however, able to find some notable cases.

On March 26, 2015, corrections officer Michelle George was driving detainee Felicia Daigle to the Avoyelles Parish Women's Correctional Center when she took a detour to Paincourtville.<sup>25</sup> Officer George allowed the detainee to exit the transport van to go purchase illegal drugs and, when she did not return, George sent another inmate to go look for her.<sup>26</sup> Officer George attempted to fabricate a story that the detainee hopped out of the car while she was stopping down to stop at a gas station, but eventually came clean.<sup>27</sup> She plead guilty to assisting escape of a detainee and various counts of malfeasance and was sentenced to three years of incarceration.<sup>28</sup>

On September 5<sup>th</sup> of this year, seven inmates of the Avoyelles Parish Women's Correctional Center attempted to escape the facility. These women were Ka'Dasha Gallow, Loretta Moore, Lauren Ebert, Angela Sullivan, Gerri Wooten, Tonya Roy, and Autoria Denice

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.kalb.com/2020/06/25/anderson-prepares-to-step-down-as-avoyelles-parish-sheriff/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.kalb.com/video/2023/10/15/david-dauzat-re-elected-avoyelles-parish-sheriff/>

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> <https://archive.avoyellestoday.com/news-cops-lifestyle/%E2%80%98strong-women%E2%80%99-graduate-anti-abuse-course-women%E2%80%99s-detention-center-cottonport>

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.houmatoday.com/story/news/crime/2015/04/02/officer-charged-in-jail-inmates-escape/27133093007/>

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.wafb.com/story/29722019/former-avoyelles-parish-corrections-officer-sentenced-for-helping-inmate-escape/>

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

Lachney.<sup>29</sup> The women were able to manipulate the facility's locking mechanism, allowing them to open the back door (fire escape) to the dorm.<sup>30</sup> From there, they were apparently given rides to various locations in the Bunkie area.<sup>31</sup> Five of the women, excluding Wooten and Lachney, were quickly recaptured. Three of the women were found in the Bunkie area by APSO Deputies and detectives, while the other two were found by APSO investigation and enlisting the help of the chase team from the Raymond Laborde Correctional Center (RLCC).<sup>32</sup> The remaining two inmates were recaptured that same evening.<sup>33</sup>

Transparency is one thing the Avoyelles Women's Correctional Center suffers from a lack of. True, there are plenty of inmate rosters or locator websites available from third parties, including one from the APSO website previously mentioned. Otherwise, information on jail operations, overall populations, and conditions is hard to come by, and inconsistent when it is. Additionally, the APSO and Women's Correctional Center staff themselves are not useful resources for procuring information. Only thanks to information shared in a spreadsheet by Professor Andrea Armstrong was I able to see a glimpse of the facility's population demographics. The facility reported that the total DOC population of the facility was six Black women and 29 White women, ranging ages 23-56.<sup>34</sup> These inmates were serving sentences ranging from one to four months.<sup>35</sup>

I was unable to find any information specific to the budget and financing of the Avoyelles Women's Correctional Center. I was able to find a performance audit from 2015 containing some information on the facility's finances. The audit could not provide occupancy rates for that year because the report states that the facility was "Combined with Avoyelles Bunkie Detention Center,"<sup>36</sup> but I was unsuccessful in finding any source confirming that merger. The audit demonstrates that staff received in \$7.73/hour and the average offender savings upon release was \$975.<sup>37</sup> I could not otherwise find accreditation proof.

---

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.katc.com/news/covering-louisiana/most-escapees-from-cottonport-womens-prison-captured-two-still-at-large>

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.kalb.com/2023/09/05/apso-searching-escapees-dc-3-womens-jail-facility-cottonport/>

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup>

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ULxjn4TY1EX4T79OPA2XXk93S4qq6OnuVSMFa95iFD8/edit#gid=1107631952>

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> [https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/87d9ddaec96efe3a86257f94007293f3/\\$file/0000e78f.pdf](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/87d9ddaec96efe3a86257f94007293f3/$file/0000e78f.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*