

To: Professor Armstrong and Professor Kumar
From: Renea Pellegrino
Date: November 28, 2023
RE: St. Helena Parish Jail Memo

Memorandum

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Overview

Saint Helena Parish Jail is located in the Parish of St. Helena, in the town of Greensburg Louisiana. The physical address for the facility is 387 Sitman Street, Greensburg, Louisiana, 70441¹. St. Helena Parish Jail is sometimes referred to as St. Helena Detention Center². The jail is under the management and operation of the St. Helena Parish Sheriff’s Office, which is located at 19 N 1st Street, Greensburg, Louisiana, 70441³. The current residing Sheriff is Nathaniel “Nat” Williams⁴. Sheriff Williams has held this position since 2007⁵, however, as of October 14, 2023, Clay Chutz has been elected to the position of Sheriff for St. Helena and will take office on June 30, 2024⁶. The Sheriff is the head law enforcement officer in St. Helena Parish⁷.

Though the Sheriff holds the title of head law enforcement officer, St. Helena Parish Jail is under the direction of Warden Marvin Schaffer⁸. Warden Schaffer is ultimately responsible for the “care, custody, and control” of those incarcerated at the facility, and is entrusted to ensure that the people who are housed there retain access to their rights and medical services⁹. The facility houses fifty-six people at any given time and also serves as a holding facility for those who have been sentenced to serve time under the supervision of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections¹⁰ (DOC). Like most parish jails, those who are incarcerated at St. Helena Parish Jail remain incarcerated unless released on bond, set free by the courts, or have served the sentence imposed on them¹¹.

Location

St. Helena Parish was formed in 1810 and named for Saint Helena¹². St. Helena Parish is located on the state's eastern side of the state, just 84.6 miles northwest of New Orleans¹³. On its

¹ <https://nodeathpenalty.org/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>

² *Id.*

³ <https://louisiana.staterecords.org/sthelenaparish>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ <https://sthelenaso.org/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>.

⁶ <https://www.brproud.com/news/local-news/st-helena-parish/oct-14-election-st-helena-parish-voters-choose-new-sheriff-police-jurors/>

⁷ <https://sthelenaso.org/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² <https://louisiana.staterecords.org/sthelenaparish>

¹³ <https://www.google.com/maps/place/St+Helena+Sheriff+Office/@30.8308827,-91.2257591,9z/data=!3m1!5s0x8626fec429cf2a73:0x3a731efc09b1d399!4m6!3m5!1s0x8626feb1a96bced:0xa70c2fecef288d0b!8m2!3d30.8308781!4d-90.6650701!16s%2Fg%2F1tkf1bcs?entry=ttu>

western side St. Helena borders East Feliciana and East Baton Rouge parishes¹⁴, to the south is Livingston Parish¹⁵, and to the east is Tangipahoa Parish¹⁶. Directly north of St. Helena is the Mississippi-Louisiana state line. The parish itself is small, covering only 409 square miles of the state¹⁷. St. Helena is revered for its rustic qualities and the ability to capture the essence of rural life in Louisiana¹⁸. The parish holds true to these characteristics, as there is not even one traffic light¹⁹ found within St. Helena.

As of 2021, St. Helena is home to just 10,925 residents²⁰, which is a .9% decrease in population since the 2010 census²¹. 51.1% of the residents identify as Black and 46.7% of the residents identify as white²². There are 5,377 housing units located in the parish, with 76% of those homes owner-occupied²³. About 55% of the residents of the parish are within the age range of 18-64 years of age²⁴. 77% of the parish population has obtained a high school diploma or GED equivalent²⁵, while only 12% of the parish has obtained a bachelor's degree or other form of higher education²⁶. There are roughly one hundred and thirteen employer establishments²⁷, none of which are women-owned or minority-owned employer firms. As of 2021, the median income for the parish is \$40,857²⁸, with a per capita income of \$21,821²⁹. 25.3% of the population lives in poverty³⁰. The largest towns in St. Helena Parish are Greensburg and Montpelier³¹. The remaining towns within the parish are unincorporated³² and include Pine Grove, Easleyville, Grangeville, Chipola, Darlington, Coleman Town, Liverpool, and Hillsdale.

Greensburg Louisiana is the seat of St. Helena Parish, and also the only one of two incorporated communities within the parish. As of 2020, the population of Greensburg is 629³³ residents and the area only covers a total of 2.52 square miles³⁴. Greensburg is the location for the St. Helena Parish Jail, as well as the parish's oldest and most significant landmark, The Old

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ <https://brac.org/neighborhoods/helena/#:~:text=Helena%20Parish-St.,to%20just%20over%2010%2C000%20residents>

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sthelenaparishlouisiana,la/PST045218>

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our_offices/parishes/st%20helena/features/about_parish

³² *Id.*

³³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sthelenaparishlouisiana,la/PST045218>

³⁴ *Id.*

St. Helena Parish Jail. Greensburg also is home to the location of all parish records offices, clerks of court, sheriff's office, courthouse, and all other government functions for St. Helena Parish³⁵.

St. Helena Parish Jail

St. Helena Parish Jail is a minimum security correctional facility located at 387 Sitman Street, Greensburg, Louisiana³⁶. The jail can house up to fifty-six people at any given time and is also used as a holding facility for those who are sentenced to serve time with the DOC³⁷. St. Helena Parish jail does not discriminate regarding whether they are housing an adult or juvenile³⁸. Further, there is no information provided about whether females are housed at this facility. Of the people who are incarcerated at St. Helena Parish Jail, most have been booked within the past year³⁹, however, about 20%⁴⁰ of the population has been incarcerated for a year or more.

The facility and its grounds are maintained by a supervised workforce made up of those who are incarcerated within St. Helena Parish Jail⁴¹. Labor from those incarcerated at the facility is utilized beyond the parish jail walls for manual labor for “various Parish agencies, Community Service Projects, and Litter Crews⁴².” St. Helena Parish Jail employs a supervision staff of about twenty-nine people⁴³.

The people who are incarcerated at St. Helena Parish Jail do not remain anonymous and at any given moment a person can view the full jail roster on the St. Helena Parish website⁴⁴. The full name, birth date, gender, racial identification, and arrest date can be viewed from this site. For example, as of November 27, 2023, sixty people were held in custody at this facility, 34 of whom identify as Black⁴⁵. The information that is not available to the viewer is whether the person is being held pre-trial, if they have been convicted to serve time in the custody of the DOC, their sentencing length, and what offense they are charged with. Any person who visits this site may also request to be notified upon the release of a particular individual⁴⁶. The notification requests are free, and a person can be notified via email, text message, phone call, and TTY messaging⁴⁷.

One death in custody has been reported at St. Helena Parish Jail since 2014⁴⁸. On July 18, 2018, Corey Cleveland was admitted into the custody and care of St. Helena Parish Jail for the

³⁵ <https://sthelenaso.org/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ <https://monroecountysheriff.info/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>

³⁹ <http://www.sthelena.lavns.org/roster.aspx>

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ <https://sthelenaso.org/About/Detention/Facility/tabid/65/Default.aspx>

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ <https://monroecountysheriff.info/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.sthelena.lavns.org/roster.aspx>

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ <https://vinelink.vineapps.com/person-detail/offender/34513976>

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/la-prison-deaths/st-helena/>

charge of theft of a firearm⁴⁹. Mr. Cleveland passed away at some point on August 22, 2018⁵⁰. St. Helena Parish Jail does not report or record the time of day or where in the facility an incarcerated person has perished if the cause of death is related to illness, drug overdose, or AIDS⁵¹. At the age of fifty, Mr. Cleveland expired from what was determined by the coroner to be a drug overdose⁵². He had only been in custody for thirty-five days⁵³.

Litigation and Media Coverage

There is no significant litigation or media coverage directly related to St. Helena Parish Jail. However, what cannot be found for the facility itself is made up for by the behavior of previous Sheriffs and other employees of the St. Helena Parish Sheriff's Office. In 1997 St. Helena Parish Sheriff Eugene Holland was sentenced to serve sixteen months and repay \$27,000.00 to the parish for his misappropriation of funds for personal use and also for utilizing the labor of incarcerated people for his personal gain⁵⁴. Mr. Holland died a free man amongst friends and family on December 14, 2010⁵⁵. Mr. Holland's successor, Chaney Phillips, only served for a year as Sheriff of St. Helena Parish before being convicted of fraud and money laundering and sentenced to eight years⁵⁶. Phillips completed his sentence and was released in 2003.

In 1998 Ronald "Gun" Ficklin took the position as St. Helena Parish Sheriff⁵⁷. Unbeknownst to parish residents, Sheriff Ficklin had a passion for restoring and reselling stolen cars. Ficklin and his partner in crime, Barry Dawsey had been operating a chop shop located at Dawsey's home⁵⁸. What is possibly most troubling is that Sheriff Ficklin would take people incarcerated at St. Helena Parish Jail⁵⁹ from the jail to Dawsey's home and use them for their labor to further his illegal endeavors. In 2007, after holding the position of Sheriff for nearly a decade, Ficklin pleaded guilty to seventeen felony counts related to charges including trafficking in vehicles and vehicle parts, altering Vehicle Identification Numbers, mail fraud, and abetting possession of a firearm by a convicted felon⁶⁰. He was sentenced to five years and three months for his discretions⁶¹. In October of 2011, Ficklin succumbed to his battle with cancer while serving his sentence in Federal custody⁶².

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna17013885>

⁵⁵ <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/theadvocate/name/eugene-holland-obituary?id=22909104&fhid=12374>

⁵⁶ *United States v. Phillips*, 219 F.3d 404 (5th Cir. 2000)

⁵⁷ <https://www.wafb.com/story/6039490/st-helena-sheriff-pleads-guilty-to-17-felony-counts/>; A sheriff accused of having state prisoners work at a stolen car "chop shop" and using them as his race-car pit crew resigned and pleaded guilty, becoming the third St. Helena Parish sheriff in a row convicted of federal charges.

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ <https://www.wafb.com/story/15766988/former-sheriff-gun-ficklin-dies-in-prison/>

⁶² *Id.*

Sheriff Nathaniel “Nat” Williams won in a special election⁶³ held due to Ficklin’s legal troubles. Sheriff Williams is the first Black person to hold the position of Sheriff⁶⁴ in St. Helena Parish. During his sixteen years in office, Sheriff Williams has not been the subject of any scandal or criminal charges. However, his Chief Civil Deputy, Tequilla Douglas, was recently arrested⁶⁵ after confessing to the theft of \$35,000.00 from the Sheriff’s Office. This news came just months after Frank E. Johnson, the President of St. Helena Parish Police Jury was arrested⁶⁶ for “seeking a bribe to influence an emergency disaster relief contract after Hurricane Ida.” Unfortunately for Johnson, this is not his first brush with criminal legal issues. In 2011, he was arrested and booked into St. Helena Parish Jail for a felony count of illegal possession of stolen property, after deputies discovered Johnson in possession of a four-wheeler that had been reported stolen⁶⁷.

St. Helena Parish has a new sheriff in town⁶⁸. In June of 2024⁶⁹, Sheriff-Elect Clay Chutz will take his position in office. He is a born and raised native of St. Helena Parish and has served as police detail to the past six governors of the state under the Louisiana State Police Protective Service⁷⁰. Given this rural Louisiana Parish’s checkered past of those who are elected to oversee and secure citizens who find themselves on the adverse side of the criminal legal system, it may be good practice to keep a close eye on the dealings of St. Helena Parish Jail, especially in how the labor of incarcerated people is being used and potentially abused.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ <https://sthelenaso.org/louisiana/county-jail/st-helena-parish-jail/>.

⁶⁵ https://www.brproud.com/news/local-news/st-helena-parish-sheriff-employee-stole-35k-from-department-to-gamble/?utm_source=ground.news&utm_medium=referral

⁶⁶ https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/st-helena-parish-police-jury-president-arrested-accused-of-bribery-in-hurricane-ida-contracts/article_0a577102-8dc3-11ec-bacf-7f2e2b63b179.html

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ https://unfilteredwithkiran.com/st-helena-parish-election-updates-chutz-wins-sheriffs-race/#google_vignette

⁶⁹ <https://claychutzforsheriff.com/about/>

⁷⁰ *Id.*