

TO: Professors Andrea Armstrong and Nishi Kumar

FROM: Angel Williams

RE: “Better Know a Jail” Memo

DATE: December 7, 2021

West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center

Introduction

West Baton Rouge Parish is one of sixty-four (64) parishes in Louisiana. It encompasses 204 square miles and has a population of over 26,000.¹ The Parish is comprised of three incorporated areas: the city of Port Allen and the towns Brusly and Addis. The West Baton Rouge Detention Center was built in 1997 as a part of the Law Enforcement Center.² It belongs to the corrections division of the West Baton Rouge Sherriff’s Office (WBRSO) and is under the supervision of Warden Rhonda Alleman.

Jail Characteristics

The West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center is a minimum-security facility located on 1150 Northwest Drive in Port Allen, LA 70767. The Center was constructed to house 330 incarcerated people- 297 males and 33 females.³ This facility was originally built to house incarcerated people who were pre-trial and post-trial in status.⁴ As of recently, they have housed individuals in both federal and LDOC custody as well. More than half of Louisiana’s state inmates are housed in parish jails due to a lack of space in state prisons. In return, these parish jails are paid \$24.39/ day to house these incarcerated people. Currently, West Baton Rouge Parish is housing 430 of them.⁵

The live jail database cannot be accessed through the Parish’s main website at <https://www.wbrparish.org/>. On the top of the webpage, there are several links that focus on community resources and services but there is not link to the West Baton Rouge Parish jail, detention center or work release facility. To get to these webpages, a user would have to use the search box located in the right-hand corner of the website. A search the West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center will lead you to a list of results.⁶ By clicking on the first link, the user is transported to the main information page. This page gives general information about the facility. At the bottom, there are six alternating yellow and blue buttons. The second to last button takes the user to the roster of people currently in custody at the facility. This a simpler route than navigating through the sheriff’s department which can be accessed on the home page.

As of Monday, December 6, 2021, at 9 PM (CST), the Detention Center has 157 people in custody. Of those 157, five were female. Of those five females, four were white. There are

¹ <https://www.louisiana.gov/local-louisiana/west-baton-rouge-parish>

² <https://www.wbrparish.org/640/Detention-Center>

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ <https://www.wafb.com/2019/03/12/kiran-sex-offender-found-working-home-west-baton-rouge-sheriff/>

⁶ <https://www.wbrparish.org/Search?searchPhrase=detention%20center>

currently 152 males in custody. Of those 152 men, 100 of them are Black.⁷ Although the original intent of the detention center was for pre-trial and post-trial detainment, three men have been in the facility since 2005 and have served the longest amount of time in custody at the West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center.⁸ A majority of the people in custody at this facility are held short-term.

Visitation is allowed from 9 am to 6 pm every weekday and each person in custody are allowed no more than one visitor a day and these visitors, "...may visit no more than one time per week, Monday through Saturday at this Port Allen LA location. Visitors must sign in at least 15 minutes prior to their scheduled visits. If you schedule a visit and don't show up or show up late, you will not be allowed to visit the rest of that week, including Saturday. If a visit on Saturday is scheduled, and the visitor does not show up or shows up late, they will not be allowed to visit until the following Saturday. Repeated late arrival or no-show violations may result in longer suspension of visiting privileges"⁹

Public Records Request and Inmate Mortality

The WBR Parish website has simple access to a Public Records Request form but does not specify the point of contact for this form. Users, by simply clicking on the Government tab on the home page, can gain access to the Public Records Request form on the drop-down menu.¹⁰ Based on helpful tips given by previous students of this course, I knew to submit my Public Records Requests directly to the Warden of the facility, Rhonda Alleman. Unfortunately, the website does not list contact information for the Warden.¹¹ I had to call and get transferred to her office to ask for the best way to submit Public Records Requests.

Based on the CJ-9's provided from the facility, from 2014 to 2019, there has only been one death reported of a man that died while in the custody of the West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center:

On August 26, 2019, a 26-year-old from Brusly, LA by the name of Darius Craig was found hanging in his cell from bed sheets around 6:45 p.m.¹² Medical responders attempted to revive him but were unsuccessful and pronounced him dead an hour later.¹³ Craig, "had been set for release Aug. 6 after serving time for domestic abuse battery. That conviction violated his parole in Texas and allowed the parish jail to hold him for up to 10 days longer, pending extradition."¹⁴ Twenty days later, Darius was still in custody.

His family subsequently filed a lawsuit against Mike Cazes in his capacity as the Sheriff in the Baton Rouge federal court. The complaint alleges wrongful death and false imprisonment.

⁷ <http://www.westbatonrouge.lavns.org/roster.aspx>

⁸ <http://www.westbatonrouge.lavns.org/roster.aspx>

⁹ <https://www.inmateaid.com/visitation/west-baton-rouge-parish-detention-center#visitation-hours>

¹⁰ <https://www.wbrparish.org/DocumentCenter/View/1505/Public-Records-Request>

¹¹ <https://wbr council.org/directory.aspx?EID=116>

¹² Form CJ-9, Deaths in Custody – 2019.

¹³ https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_63395f32-c909-11e9-ba8a-ab0e892d6a0e.html

¹⁴ *Id.*

Tiara and Donna Craig, Darius' wife and mother respectively, believe the West Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office violated Craig's Fourth and 14th Amendment rights. They say he should have been released from the jail 10 days before his death — after authorities in Texas missed a deadline to extradite him for a misdemeanor infraction.¹⁵

Jail Leadership

Sheriff Mike Cazes is the West Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff. He is in his fifth term and began his tenure in 2004. Sheriff Cazes has been a law enforcement officer in West Baton Rouge Parish for over 45 years. He became a reserve deputy immediately after graduating from high school.¹⁶

In past elections, Sheriff Cazes won by a landslide, however, in the 2020 election Sheriff Cazes only defeated his challenger, Mike Zito, by 242 votes.¹⁷ This close race was due to the lack of community trust and the lack of transparency in the Sheriff's office. These were top issues on the campaign trail, but Cazes also had to deal with personal allegations. Cazes, "...also had to contend with allegations that he paid an inmate to perform personal work on his home, which prompted a state investigation that found no criminal violations."¹⁸ Ultimately, he was reelected due to his ample experience and the programs which he implemented in his previous terms.¹⁹ While in office, Cazes: established a training division among his deputies, created an IT division, restructured the Narcotics and Criminal Interdiction divisions, created a Work Release Center and started several Community Outreach programs.²⁰

Jail News Coverage and Transparency

Sheriff Cazes was also under scrutiny after two successful attempts were made by two of the men incarcerated at the West Baton Rouge Detention Center less than a week apart.²¹ There was also another escape attempt less than a year later. In 2018:

1. On November 8, 2021, Michael Jones, a 41-year-old man, had escaped in the evening when he walked off from the facility while taking out the trash before jumping over the fence. Jones was serving time since 2010 for an armed robbery. He was transferred to trustee status on October 11, 2018, and scheduled to be released on June 6, 2021. He was apprehended a month later in East Baton Rouge.²²
2. On November 15, 2018, at approximately 10 PM, Kovaria Williams, a 32-year-old man, climbed on top of a shed, jumped a fence, and escaped from the facility. Williams was serving an eight-year sentence for probation revocation from a previous

¹⁵<https://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/theadvocate.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/d/92/d92ddb4e-5263-11ea-9b91-1363a3250512/5e4c042e3140a.pdf.pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.thewestsidejournal.com/news/sheriff-mike-cazes-sworn-in-for-fifth-term/article_26ab0a72-bb05-11ea-919f-f7a3d19bd5ed.html

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ [theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_a113dfa8-063f-11ea-9b13-9ff350b0c9bd.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_a113dfa8-063f-11ea-9b13-9ff350b0c9bd.html)

¹⁹ https://www.thewestsidejournal.com/news/sheriff-mike-cazes-sworn-in-for-fifth-term/article_26ab0a72-bb05-11ea-919f-f7a3d19bd5ed.html

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ https://www.thewestsidejournal.com/news/west-baton-rouge-inmate-escapes-by-jumping-fence/article_ef45c8e6-e9ec-11e8-ba14-a7427e1ddb67.html

²² <https://www.wafb.com/2018/11/30/wbr-escaped-inmate-caught-baton-rouge/>

- charge of aggravated domestic assault. He was set to be released on Oct. 20, 2019, but was part of an early-release program and could have been released in as few months. Williams was found in East Baton Rouge and bought back into custody two months later in January of 2019.²³ Four deputies were arrested and charged with malfeasance and sexual misconduct with a prisoner as a result of the investigation into this escape (but unrelated to the escape itself).²⁴
3. On March 5, 2019, Jimmy Wayne Gioele, a 37-year-old man, wedged through a gap between the fence and gate of the enclosed trash area when told to take the trash out. The deputy that was supervising this task, saw Gioele running through the adjacent field, but lost sight of him in the fog. Tracking dogs brought in from Angola State Penitentiary were not successful in locating him. Gioele's original release date was December 4, 2019. He was serving a five-year sentence for a probation violation stemming from a prior arrest for possession of methamphetamine, simple burglary, and unauthorized use of a movable. He was found two days later in Memphis, TN.²⁵

As previously stated above, a lack of community trust and a lack of transparency in the Sheriff's office almost cost Sheriff Cazes his fifth term. The race to the elected seat focused a large part on mending community trust after the fatal shooting of a man by a deputy in Port Allen.²⁶ Community members also pushed for greater transparency following the death of Josef Richardson during a "no-knock" narcotics raid.²⁷

On March 12, 2019, an incarcerated person by the name of Elmer Castillo, was seen working unsupervised at Sheriff Mike Cazes home. Sheriff Cazes alleges that he personally hired Castillo to do some work for him.²⁸ Castillo used a parish van due to his involvement in the West Baton Rouge Work Release Program. This program called for the opportunity for the incarcerated to do work in the facility, but they were not supposed to be sent into the community. DOC says they had no knowledge of Mr. Castillo working for the Sheriff.²⁹

Josef Richardson was a 38-year-old man shot by West Baton Rouge sheriff's deputy during a July narcotics operation. Richardson was unarmed and unclothed (wearing only his underwear) when law enforcement executed the warrant. Deputy Vance Mantranga Jr. fired the single shot that hit and killed Richardson. He was shot in the back of the neck and his spine was severed. He died at the scene.³⁰ His family has filed a wrongful death lawsuit under the claim that the killing

²³ <https://www.wafb.com/2019/01/08/escaped-wbr-inmate-rearrested/>

²⁴ <https://www.kplctv.com/2018/12/04/four-west-baton-rouge-parish-deputies-arrested-after-inmate-escape-investigations/>

²⁵ https://www.thewestsidejournal.com/news/state-inmate-escaped-from-wbr-detention-center-through-gap-in-fence-saturday-morning/article_c2fc1df6-4f33-11e9-8d38-43e71dbd4d3a.html

²⁶ theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_a113dfa8-063f-11ea-9b13-9ff350b0c9bd.html

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ <https://www.wafb.com/2019/03/12/kiran-sex-offender-found-working-home-west-baton-rouge-sheriff/>

²⁹ <https://www.wafb.com/2019/03/12/kiran-sex-offender-found-working-home-west-baton-rouge-sheriff/>

³⁰ https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_727f21b6-c841-11e9-8deb-371af38d969a.html

was unjustified because he was surrendering when the deputy pulled the trigger.³¹ The family is represented by Ben Crump. A year later, on July 16, 2020, Victor Mantranga Jr. was cleared of wrongdoing and cleared to return to duty as a Deputy.³² As a result of the news coverage surrounding this, the Sheriff requested that Mr. Castillo be moved to a state prison in another Parish.³³

In the span of two months, July and August of 2019, the Sheriff's office, as a result of the death of Darius Craig and the shooting of Josef Richardson, were featured on WAFB's website sixteen times.³⁴ They were mentioned on The Advocate's website twenty-three. Despite all the news coverage surrounding the incidents in 2019, there was no coverage on Darius Craig³⁵, Josef Richardson³⁶, or their deaths and the investigation on said deaths on the Sheriff's website.

The Louisiana Department of Corrections does not have oversight on the West Baton Rouge Parish Detention Center because it is a local jail. Other than the inmates housed at the Detention Center, the Department of Corrections does not own the Detention Center.³⁷ The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) under the United States Department of Justice requires WBRSO to submit their CJ-9's annually. Further, the BJS is responsible for data collection and surveys of local jails.³⁸

³¹<https://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/theadvocate.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/5/01/50142eba-cf20-11e9-9b7d-bba600acd9d4/5d6fca91c7a75.pdf.pdf>

³² <https://www.wafb.com/2020/07/16/josef-richardson-shooting-deputies-cleared-wrongdoing/>

³³ <https://www.wafb.com/2019/03/12/kiran-sex-offender-found-working-home-west-baton-rouge-sheriff/>

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ <https://www.wbrparish.org/Search?searchPhrase=darius+craig>

³⁶ <https://www.wbrparish.org/Search?searchPhrase=josef%20richardson%20&pageNumber=1&perPage=10&departmentId=-1>

³⁷ Phone Call with Sheriff's Office on December 3, 2021, at 11:30 AM (CST).

³⁸ <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty&tid=12>