

TO: Professors Erica Navalance and Nishi Kumar

FROM: Catherine Ashley

RE: Jail Memo

DATE: December 9, 2024

BIENVILLE PARISH JAIL MEMORANDUM

This memorandum seeks to address the main factors and characteristics of the Bienville Parish Jail located in Arcadia, Louisiana. Some background about the Parish includes that it is in the northwest portion of Louisiana with an approximate population of 13,000 people¹. Bienville Parish demographics as a whole are about 53.5% white, 41.6% black, and about 4.9% hispanic or other². The most famous police action Bienville has gotten is that Bonnie and Clyde were shot and killed in Bienville Parish on May 23, 1934³.

JAIL CHARACTERISTIC

The Bienville Parish Jail is located at 100 Courthouse Drive, Arcadia, Louisiana 71001. Bienville Parish Jail is a partner of the Louisiana Department of Corrections (LA-DOC) through the Louisiana Sheriff's Association⁴. According to this partnership Bienville Parish Jail follows the Basic Jail Guidelines (BJG) which were originally developed in 1997, but were most recently revised in 2019⁵. Bienville Parish Jail is a part of BJG Northwest Region Local Facilities⁶. Under current LA-DOC guidelines, the general principle that determines if a prisoner is likely going to be housed in a local facility is if they have a shorter sentence and/or lower custody, but they also consider medical and disciplinary needs⁷. Bienville Parish Jail houses those individuals as well as individuals awaiting trial and transport⁸.

The Jail is attached to the old Courthouse and has a capacity of 55, however currently only 30 individuals are being held there. In 2013, Bienville Parish completed construction of a new Courthouse, the project cost 10.9 million dollars⁹. The developers of the project stated, "the parish's existing courthouse was undersized for today's government and very inefficient as a result of multiple additions¹⁰." Despite that, the new building did not include construction of a new jail, but in October 2023 the Policy Jury for Bienville Parish began discussing building a

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bienville_Parish,_Louisiana

² <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/bienville-parish-la/>

³ <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=128271>

⁴ <https://lsa.org/sheriffs-directory/>

⁵ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Basic-Jail-Guidelines-as-of-April-2019.pdf>

⁶ https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/handbook4friends.familiesofinmates_9_11_19.pdf

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2024/11/>

⁹ <https://www.pcigulfsouth.org/bienville-parish-courthouse>

¹⁰ *Id.*

new jail and how to finance it¹¹. Additionally, these two buildings, though they are located in different places, have the same address.

The Bienville Parish Sheriff's Office Jail Roster website¹² contains the following information: Inmate name, date of birth, gender, arrest date, and race. The roster is updated often throughout the day¹³. The Jail Roster only lists White in the race category and it is left blank otherwise. Of the 30 individuals in the Jail 43.3% are white and 56.7% do not have their race listed. All are male. Other statistics include 29 of the 30 individuals have been arrested within that past two years. The median age is 38 years old but ages range from 19 to 67. Of the 30 individuals there are 5 pairs of individuals that share the same birthday.

SHERIFF

The Bienville Parish website lists the Sheriff's Duties and Responsibilities which include administrative duties such as serving as the parish's jailor, collection and distribution of court fines, submitting a budget of his office to the Policy Jury, keeping Louisiana Department Reports, and keeping a jail docket¹⁴. The Sheriff of Bienville Parish is Sheriff John E. Ballance¹⁵. He became the longest serving sheriff in Northwest Louisiana when he began his seventh consecutive term in 2024; his first term began in the year 2000¹⁶. John Ballance has a degree in Criminal Justice¹⁷ and is part of the Louisiana Sheriff's Association¹⁸.

The most recent audit of Bienville Parish Sheriff was conducted in 2023, it was conducted by an independent auditor¹⁹. Based on this report the Bienville Parish Sheriff had no known misappropriation of funds during the test period and also no outstanding debt during the end of the fiscal period²⁰. The Sheriff, John Ballance makes a base salary of around 145,000 dollars a year, but with added benefits it is about 227,000²¹. The sub-total for the custody of prisoners is 1,228,807²². However, Bienville Parish Jail is estimated to have brought in 86,691 dollars in revenue based on data from the DOC²³.

Despite the fact that John Ballance has been Sheriff for over 20 years there are very few news articles about the man. Many articles in the Bienville Parish Journal that relate to arrests or

¹¹ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2023/10/13/new-jail-number-one-priority-for-police-jury/>

¹² <http://www.bienville.lavns.org/roster.aspx>

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ <https://www.bienvilleparish.org/elected-officials/sheriff>

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ https://www.news-journal.com/bienville-sheriff-becomes-longest-serving-in-northwest-louisiana/article_7ecc0c89-2108-5267-842f-5594d50fbd82.html

¹⁷ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2023/07/21/sheriff-john-ballance-announces-his-run-for-re-election-for-bienville-parish-sheriff/>

¹⁸ <https://lsa.org/sheriffs-directory/>

¹⁹ [https://app2.la.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/a0daad6284e8d9b986258aca005fa642/\\$file/00003d71.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app2.la.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/a0daad6284e8d9b986258aca005fa642/$file/00003d71.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ <https://louisianavoice.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/sheriffs-salaries1.pdf>

²² *Id.*

²³ <https://www.vera.org/louisiana-locked-up/parish/Bienville>

the duties of the Sheriff include quotes from Ballance but they are typically very short and factual about the situation. Ballance does appear to run the Bienville Parish Sheriff's Office Facebook²⁴. On the page he disclaims that the page is intended "to provide a source of information including felony arrest, public safety announcements and sheriff's office events and stories of interest. It is not intended to be a forum of debate regarding arrests! All individuals arrested are assumed to be innocent until proven guilty in a court of law²⁵." The page continues to state all individuals are innocent until proven guilty with all arrest updates posted on the page.

PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST & INMATE MORTALITY

The Bienville Parish Sheriff's Office does not have simple access to a Public Records Request form, nor do they specify the point of contact for this form. However, based on information previously gathered for this course, I was able to send my PRR letter to Randy Price over email. Randy Price is the Chief Criminal Deputy and students in past years were able to identify him as a good point of contact²⁶. Additionally, as an added measure I sent Certified Mail to all of my facilities early on, in September, because I wanted that record in addition to emails.

Randy got back to me relatively quickly to inform me that there had been no deaths during that time period I had requested. It did take him a little while to get me an official Zero Deaths Letter (ZDL), however I did eventually receive it, which means that the facility did not encounter any deaths in custody for the requested years. The years requested were 2020-2024 and the ZDL received included dates between January 1, 2020 to December 30, 2023. This mix up felt like a miscommunication as I meant 2020-2024 at the present moment, and Randy thought just up until 2024. Randy likely also thought there were only 30 days in December. Due to this, I followed up asking for the dates December 31, 2023 to the present date. Randy responded by email saying there had been no deaths during that time period either.

Based on my research the facility has only had one death in custody since 2014. Matthew Makowsky in 2017²⁷. He was reported to have died from a drug overdose, he was 26 years old at the time. Another inmate was charged with getting the drugs into the facility that led to Matthew's death²⁸.

EVIDENCE OF OVERSIGHT & TRANSPARENCY

Bienville Parish Jail is required to submit information to the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement²⁹ as that is the entity designated as their State Administering Agency (SSA) and they are tasked with collecting such data for submission to the Bureau of Justice

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/p/Bienville-Parish-Sheriffs-Office-100064864590816/>

²⁵ *Id* on March 22, 2023.

²⁶ <https://www.bienvilleparish.org/elected-officials/sheriff>

²⁷ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/la-prison-deaths/bienville/>

²⁸ <https://www.ksla.com/story/37079619/drug-overdose-kills-bienville-parish-inmate-second-prisoner-faces-charges/>

²⁹ <https://lclelsac.com/deathincustody/>

Assistance³⁰. Additionally, the Bienville Parish Jail is audited yearly by an independent auditor through the Louisiana Legislative Auditor³¹. The Jail is not accredited by any national associations and there has not been in the past five years nor is there currently a judicial order or consent decree.

The Bienville Parish Journal does reports about the arrests and sentencing of individuals who were held in the Jail, which provides some oversight and transparency and creates a record of individuals who pass through the Jail³². The Bienville Parish Journal also covers council meetings and hearings.

NEWS COVERAGE

The notable stories coming out of Bienville Parish Jail include one officer finding himself behind bars and various escapees. On June 15, 2023, Bienville Parish Sheriff jailer deputy Randall Perritt landed himself on the other side of the jail cell³³. He was arrested for malfeasance of office and six counts of simple battery³⁴. Sheriff John Ballance told the news that the inmate was tampering with the surveillance camera and Deputy Perritt asked him to stop and when he didn't comply Perritt entered the cell and shoved the inmate against the wall four times and slapped him twice³⁵. The event occurred on a Thursday, Friday Perritt had off work, on Monday he was put on leave, and on Tuesday the police obtained the warrant for his arrest and he was arrested the same day. On September 19, 2024, Perritt pled guilty to simple battery; he was sentenced to six months in parish jail, which was suspended and was placed on one year of unsupervised probation³⁶. After this there was no news about Perritt there was also no identifying information about the inmate he assaulted. While Perritt should have been arrested as soon as the incident occurred it is good that it was reported to the Bienville Parish Journal by the law enforcement agency as public information³⁷.

Bienville Parish Jail has had a few inmates escape. On April 16, 2024, one man escaped on foot after jumping out of a Bienville Parish transport van following a court hearing where the judge revoked his bond on a previous charge³⁸. He was caught a few days later. Another incident of an individual fleeing occurred March 13, 2022 while a man was being booked into the Jail³⁹. He was also later caught.

CASES

³⁰ <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1VTIRD7QCUKGhPZmXWQqCwLskbPsVbai3>

³¹ <https://lla.la.gov/reports/audit-reports/by-parish/bienville?search=Bienville%20Parish%20Sh>

³² <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2024/10/23/sentencing-for-aug-sept-and-oct/>

³³ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2023/06/28/bienville-parish-sheriff-deputy-finds-himself-behind-bars/>

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2024/10/23/sentencing-for-aug-sept-and-oct/>

³⁷ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2023/06/28/bienville-parish-sheriff-deputy-finds-himself-behind-bars/>

³⁸ <https://bienvilleparishjournal.com/2024/04/17/multiple-agencies-still-on-the-hunt-for-escapee/>

³⁹ <https://www.ksla.com/2022/03/14/escapee-loose-bienville-parish/>

There does not appear to be a case against the Sheriff or jail in its capacity as a jail within the last five years. In addition I could not find any complaints about the jail in my research including on the public Facebook page. The only case within the past five years that discusses the Bienville Parish Sheriff office or police department is *United States v. Hill*⁴⁰. Here, the defendant argued that the police violated his fourth amendment rights. The defendant said that the police did not have probable cause to believe that the vehicle he owned contained evidence of criminal activity and because there were no exigent circumstances. However the police said they could smell marijuana coming from inside the car and when they looked through the window they could see raw pot and blunts in the passenger seat ashtray. The police additionally had body cam evidence they were able to submit into evidence. The judge ruled that the defendant's fourth amendment rights had not been violated and his motion to suppress evidence was denied.

⁴⁰ *United States v. Hill*, No. 22-CR-00279, 2023 WL 10366330 (W.D. La. Sept. 19, 2023), report and recommendation adopted, No. 22-CR-00279, 2024 WL 1078268 (W.D. La. Mar. 12, 2024)