

MEMORANDUM

TO: Professors Erica Navalance and Nishi Kumar

FROM: Jillian Brown

RE: Facility Memo

DATE: November 26, 2024
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ELAYN HUNT CORRECTIONAL CENTER

INTRODUCTION

This memorandum focuses on addressing main factors and characteristics of the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC). EHCC is a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility in Iberville Parish at the address, 6925 Highway 74, St. Gabriel, Louisiana 70776. This memorandum also discusses the population of inmates at EHCC, as well as current news-worthy stories regarding the facility, and events that have transpired within its gates.¹

DEATHS SINCE JANUARY 2020

Through the Louisiana Public Records Act, a request was made to the Louisiana DOC for correspondence and data regarding inmate deaths at EHCC between January 2020 to present day. Ultimately, the number of inmate deaths at Elayn Hunt Correctional Center from this period totaled 157, according to an email sent from the Department of Corrections. However, according to the paper records the DOC sent, the number totaled 154 deaths which were accounted for and included in the spreadsheet (up until August of 2024). There is a discrepancy of 3 reported inmate deaths between the emailed death count and the count included in the paper documents received. The death count for each year since 2020 have been: 2020 – 38, 2021 – 23, 2022 – 26, 2023 – 31, and 2024 (through August) – 36.

While many of the inmate deaths at EHCC since January 2020 have been from natural causes, there are multiple additional causes of inmate deaths that have occurred in the facility. Cancer, heart related issues, and Sepsis are often causes of inmate death within the EHCC facility, according to their data. Surprisingly, there were only 3 reported deaths due to COVID in the provided reports between 2020 and 2021 (the peak of the COVID-19 Pandemic). Only one homicide was reported since 2020, but 3 suicides have been reported (this does not include a recent 21-year-old inmate that committed suicide in October 2024). Since 2020, there have been 10 inmate deaths specifically due to overdose, according to the data received by the DOC (the data received ends with reports from August 2024; since then, there have been multiple news stories regarding inmate overdoses within the EHCC facility). An additional allegation that has spread across online platforms and communities is that the DOC, or other agencies, could be “mislabeling” deaths to cover up drug overdoses, homicides, etc.

JAIL CHARACTERISTICS

As mentioned above, the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center is overseen by the Louisiana Department of Corrections. EHCC is the second largest prison in the State of Louisiana. It was opened in 1979 and is located about 70 miles Northwest of New Orleans, LA. According to online sources, the facility has a reported capacity of 2,250 inmates. While various reports have

¹ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/elayn-hunt-correctional-center/>

contradicting data, the current population of housed inmates at EHCC ranges from 1,400 to 1,800 individuals.²

EHCC is a multi-level security institution and houses adult males only. EHCC is the primary intake point for male offenders who have been committed to the Department of Public Safety and Corrections. This intake role of the facility is known as the “Hunt Reception and Diagnostic Center” (HRDC).³

The DOC website includes a mission statement, visitation information, educational programs, and little additional information about the EHCC facility. The website states EHCC’s mission is “to provide a controlled correctional environment in a professional manner as to protect safety of the general public, the surrounding community, the staff, and imprisoned people... Imprisoned people are also provided an opportunity to make restitution and to participate in reentry initiatives as a mechanism to compensate individuals and communities harmed by crime.” Further into the memo, readers will understand better why this mission statement is quite controversial. Listed under “Goals” for EHCC is “Maintain accreditation with the American Correctional Association.”⁴ There is not much additional information regarding their accreditation status.

Visitation opportunities at EHCC have various restrictions and regulations. EHCC determines the number of visitors and incarcerated individual may see, as well as length of the visit, on the institution’s schedule. For an inmate’s first 30 days of incarceration, they are required to request special visits pending administration approval. The DOC website states that these visits are typically allowed with immediate family members, legal spouse, children, etc. This visitor request must include certain personal information such as, complete names, race, driver’s license number, relationship, social security number and more. After 30 days, visitors must be one of the ten named individuals on an inmate’s visitor list that has been approved to continue to visit. Attorney visits must be scheduled through the office of the assistant warden.⁵

EHCC also provides educational programming and opportunities, as well as jobs, to currently housed inmates. Similarly to the known work requirements at Angola, inmates at EHCC must begin working in field operations prior to becoming eligible for other work opportunities. Once an inmate completes his field work requirements, other jobs within the facility include kitchen staff, community work crews, and others. Regarding educational opportunities and programs, EHCC offers a variety of paths. EHCC offers a High School Equivalency course, a literacy program, special needs programs, and basic adult educational courses. EHCC has also partnered with Baton Rouge Community College to provide programs in the fields of welding, carpentry, HVAC, and refrigeration. Some of these programs also have the ability for inmates to receive certification in a few specialized areas (i.e., OPEESA Small Engine Technician Certification).⁶

The Agency Budget Request covers the costs associated with Elayn Hunt Correctional Center each year. In the 2024-2025 Fiscal Year Report, the actual funds used during the 2022-2023 fiscal year were included. For 2022-2023, EHCC’s Actual Means of Financing was reported to be \$94,029,632. The Existing Operative Budget as of 10/01/2023 was \$80,715,729. The total requested for the 2024-2025 fiscal year was \$128,098,150. This is a 58.7% change that

² <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/elayn-hunt-correctional-center/>

³ https://house.louisiana.gov/housefiscal/DOCS_APP_BDGT_MEETINGS/DOCS_APPBudgetMeetings2018/DOC%20-%20Public.pdf

⁴ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/elayn-hunt-correctional-center/>

⁵ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/elayn-hunt-correctional-center/>

⁶ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/elayn-hunt-correctional-center/>

has been reported. It is not surprising that the second largest prison in the State of Louisiana has such high expenses and costs to run each year, but it seems to be increasing at an alarming rate.⁷

EVIDENCE OF OVERSIGHT

An interesting aspect of EHCC has been regarding their leadership, especially in the position of warden over the facility. The history of named wardens at EHCC has quite a dramatic lineage. Tim Hooper was a previous warden at EHCC until he was moved to oversee the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola in 2021.⁸ When Hooper was moved to run Angola, the DOC named Kirt Guerin the new warden of EHCC.⁹ A year into serving as EHCC Warden, Guerin was arrested for driving under the influence of pain medication.¹⁰ Guerin was driving his state-issued motor vehicle when he swerved off the road in Prairieville, LA and hit a brick sign and a tree.¹¹ Guerin only suffered minor injuries, but was ultimately suspended from his position as warden of EHCC after this incident.¹²

Guerin eventually “retired,” and Donnie Bordelon was named the Warden of EHCC in 2022.¹³ Bordelon served as EHCC Warden until his removal in September of this year (2024). Bordelon was relieved of his duties as head warden while he was on suspension over an investigation regarding incidents of inappropriate use of force on inmates.¹⁴ When Bordelon was released from his position, the warden of another DOC facility, stepped in as interim warden of EHCC. Edward “Dusty” Bickham, Warden of Dixon Correctional Institute, replaced Bordelon in his capacity of Warden of EHCC.

According to a news release dated November 1, 2024, many changes have been made by the DOC regarding prison administration and oversight at EHCC, as well as multiple other facilities across the state. The article states that previous Louisiana State Penitentiary warden, Darrel Vannoy is returning to Angola as warden once again. This move spurred further reorganization of prison heads elsewhere. While Vannoy returns to Angola, current warden, Tim Hooper, is being placed back at his previous facility, EHCC. As mentioned above, Hooper served as the Warden of EHCC until 2021 when he was moved to Angola. Within the past few years, EHCC oversight has seen various individuals named warden. Because of the many issues at EHCC, the DOC is attempting to gain control of their facilities and administration once again.

⁷ https://doa.louisiana.gov/media/mfblv2rm/08-413-fy25_agency_budget_request_413.pdf

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https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/new-wardens-appointed-at-angola-hunt-prisons-increasing-diversity-among-doc-leaders/article_360f0e78-d855-11eb-a808-b3dd3e19ad54.html

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https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/new-wardens-appointed-at-angola-hunt-prisons-increasing-diversity-among-doc-leaders/article_360f0e78-d855-11eb-a808-b3dd3e19ad54.html

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https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/elayn-hunt-warden-arrested-suspended-for-driving-high-on-pain-meds-corrections-officials-say/article_6805565c-e8e0-11ec-bec8-4306d6e367dc.html

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¹³ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/8.19.22-EHCC-New-Warden-Bordelon.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.katc.com/news/covering-louisiana/doc-removes-elayn-hunt-correctional-center-warden>

Therefore, Vannoy will be back as warden at Angola, and Hooper will return as Warden of EHCC by the end of this year (2024).¹⁵

EVIDENCE OF TRANSPRENCY

Regarding the transparency of Elayn Hunt Correctional Center, things could drastically be improved. EHCC does not have a website, nor social media outlet, of their own; the only online source with information on this facility is the Department of Corrections website for the State of Louisiana. The DOC website has very limited information about EHCC. There are no current and accurate statistics on this facility available by a simple web search.

In addition to little website presence, EHCC does not have their own, individual Facebook or other social media account. The Louisiana DOC provides one Facebook page that is dedicated to producing updates on all state facilities which it controls. Majority of posts, specifically on Facebook, about EHCC include information about current or former staff. Little to no information regarding inmate statistics, facility data and more can be found on social media platforms.

Requesting data and public records from EHCC was not difficult, but took quite some time. Since EHCC is a DOC facility, all public records requests were directed through DOC contacts and administration. I was able to locate a public records request department email from the DOC website. Once the public records request was sent in, I received an immediate response (via email) from the DOC. They kindly informed me that they had received and processed my request and would begin working on gathering the information I was seeking.

While the DOC processed my request quickly, I did have to reach out via email on multiple occasions to check the progress of the request. Eventually, I was forwarded an email from a DOC Healthcare Division administrator with a numerical count of inmate deaths for the requested period. I had to send two follow up emails explaining that my request included the production of any physical documents they had regarding these deaths. After not hearing anything for a while, I was emailed by a DOC Attorney with an attached spreadsheet that included a breakdown of inmate death information.

Overall, while the process of receiving documents and data from the DOC regarding EHCC was not quick, it was a smooth process. I did not expect for this information to be sent expeditiously, but I was impressed with how easy it was to obtain this information. DOC and EHCC individuals involved were responsive and helpful.

NOTABLE CASES OR COMPLAINTS ON PRISON CONDITIONS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

In the past five years, many things have happened at EHCC or have been alleged to have happened at EHCC. Between lawsuits and news-worthy events, EHCC is no stranger to attention.

In 2019, an opinion from the Middle District of Louisiana came down to vacate a District Court ruling and remand the suit for dismissal without prejudice. In this suit, previous EHCC inmate, Dennis Bargher sued prison officials claiming they arranged for another inmate to attack

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<https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/2024/11/01/notorious-louisiana-prison-at-angola-has-a-new-warden/75985204007/>

him while they stood by without intervening. This suit additionally alleges information regarding an internal “extortion scheme,” staff inefficiencies, and other improper acts by officers.¹⁶

Another suit, originally filed in 2018, resulted in an EHCC inmate being awarded \$10,000 in damages after a judge ruled in his favor in July of 2023. Inmate Shawn Briscoe sued an EHCC officer for negligence after she “watched through a cell window” as he was attacked by another inmate. Officer Dallas Stewart was a named defendant in this lawsuit. Briscoe alleged Officer Stewart watched as another inmate stabbed and burned him during an attack. After nearly five years of maneuvering through the Louisiana court system, Briscoe was awarded monetary damages for the officer’s negligence.¹⁷

In addition to many lawsuits that have been filed against the DOC and EHCC officers, there has been no shortage of news stories originating from Elayn Hunt. In the past year alone, the facility has had a warden released for inappropriate use of force, a reported alarming drug problem, and more.

In August (2024), the WBRZ Investigative Unit began reporting on many problems present at EHCC (this led Governor Jeff Landry to direct Louisiana State Police to launch an investigation on Elayn Hunt Correctional Center in late August).¹⁸ Their reports have stated that multiple anonymous sources, ranging from inmates to officers, have come forward with insight to the facility’s interworking. One fascinating story involved an inmate that had special privileges at EHCC. These privileges included the inmate being allowed to “stay out all night” and “the ability to go to different places to pick up anything he wanted to.” Regarding the major drug issue at EHCC, it is reported that many of the drugs that enter the facility do so by being brought in by high-ranking officers. Multiple inmate deaths have been the result of drug overdoses within the facility. One EHCC officer was arrested for having drugs in his car on prison premises; a K9 officer was used in locating these drugs.¹⁹

In conclusion, Elayn Hunt Correctional Center has been the subject of many controversies within the Louisiana prison system, especially within the past few years. With the many administrative position changes in recent months, hopefully EHCC will see a drastic change for the better in upcoming years.

¹⁶ Dennis Bargher v. Craig White, et al, No. 17-30455 (5th Cir. 2019).

¹⁷ <https://www.wafb.com/2023/07/19/inmate-prevails-prison-attack-lawsuit/>

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7F1Mpa7woo>

¹⁹ <https://www.wbrz.com/news/investigative-unit-a-timeline-of-events-at-elayn-hunt-since-wbrz-s-initial-report/>