

MEMORANDUM

To: Erica Navalance, Nishi Kumar
From: Ashley Burns
Date: December 13, 2024
Re: Louisiana Transitional Center for Women Memo

Overview of Louisiana Transitional Center for Women

The Louisiana Transitional Center for Women (LTCW) is in Tallulah, Louisiana, located in Madison Parish near the Mississippi border. Although the city of Tallulah is relatively rural, there are four other jail and prison facilities, including the Madison Parish Correctional Center and Work Release Center, Detention Center, City Jail, and the Bayou Correctional Center. The address of LTCW is 1005 West Green Street, Tallulah, LA, 71282. While the remotely located prison can hold up to 738 inmates, the parish population is less than 9,500 residents. This facility is currently under the supervision of Warden Chris Stinson, and houses female DOC offenders, displaced LCIW inmates, regional re-entry program participants, local offenders and those pre-trial. It was previously the site of a negligently run youth detention center that was shutdown.

Regional Re-Entry Center

LTCW is a “statewide regional re-entry center”.¹ The facility is in northeast Louisiana, and it is one of the ten listed re-entry facilities for state of Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) inmates. These facilities are stated to serve special populations of inmates with additional services to support their successful re-entry into society upon their release from incarceration. About 15 years ago, the DOC established targeted re-entry programs across the state. The DOC “regionalized approach enhances the program’s ability to engage community supports, such as treatment providers, educational opportunities, and family and faith-based programs.”² Statewide collaborations were developed, “to enhance...re-entry efforts,” and offer a “plan for success” when male and female offenders come up for release from incarceration. Each of ten DOC sites is supposed to have a regional re-entry specialist assigned to help with these programming goals and purpose.

LTCW serves female offenders who are set to be discharged around the state. In addition to re-entry programming, LTCW is stated to offer adult education, college courses through Ashland University, a cosmetology, forklift operator, and risk management sex offender treatment programs, moral reconnection therapy, and curricula such as “Beyond Trauma”, Living in Balance”, “Strengthening Families” and “Thinking for Change”. In addition, this facility also hosts alternative and treatment programs for both DOC and criminal offenders across the state facing issues with substance addiction. LTCW offers substance abuse treatment programs like “Celebrate Recovery”, “Helping Women Recover” and a mind-altering substance abuse program.

Although inmate information available online is quite limited, as a regional re-entry program LTCW is supposed to be suited to prepare female offenders within a year of release or those granted a work release assignment. Re-entry program inmates are supposed to be provided with a standardized 100 hours of pre-release curriculum. The state re-entry program is also intended to

¹ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/transition-reentry/>

² <https://doc.louisiana.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/transition-reentry/>

be collaborative with local sheriffs and social services. The pre-release curriculum provides inmates with programming related to money management, parenting, anger management, substance abuse, job readiness, victim awareness, domestic violence, “values and character” development, and family reunification. More specifically, the statewide re-entry programs are intended to support offenders in, “securing valid identification documents (driver’s license, social security card, and birth certificate), residence and employment planning as well as appropriate referrals to needed community resources and post-release services.”³ However, job training skills and adult basic education is only offered where resources permit, and are not listed expressly as standard service or program available to all offenders facing re-entry.

Treatment Services: Helping Women Recover and Intensive Incarceration Program

Aside from the re-entry program, LTCW has substance abuse treatment. Other LTCW inmates may be there as mandated by a court sanction or as an alternative to incarceration for certain violations, such as substance abuse. For example, the LTCW facility is said to provide specific programming which includes, “Helping Women Recover” for substance abuse recovery. The facility is also part of the state’s “Intensive Incarceration” program which provides, “an alternative form of incarceration”.⁴ These programs were initiated by the state in 2009, and they can vary in duration. They were designed with a capacity for several hundred participants per site to complete the special programming, annually.

First, the Helping Women Recover program is focused on meeting the needs of “chemically dependent women”. “The comprehensive, seventeen-session learning package contains four modules that address the four topics that women identify as triggers for relapse: self, relationships, sexuality, and spirituality”.⁵ Program participants are also supposed to be offered family counseling sessions, “in order to develop and strengthen the bonds needed for a productive recovery upon release.”⁶ The Helping Women Recover program is designed as a 12-week or 9-month program. However, the program material notes that offenders must be literate prior to their enrollment. For example, the program information lists several workbooks as essential resources of the LTCW substance abuse curriculum. Offenders are placed in the program by court order, hearing or referral, or it is recommended by the Parole Board. Offenders, “recommended by the sentencing court or Parole Board receive placement priority.”

LTCW also offers the Intensive Incarceration Program. This program is, “an alternative form of incarceration in which offenders are sentenced without diminution of sentence to not more than twelve months by a Drug Court or sentencing court during a probation revocation hearing.”⁷ These offenders are said to require, “more intensive substance abuse treatment” before going back to the referring court and to probation supervision. The intensive incarceration alternative is a minimum of six months and up to twelve months, depending on the offender. The DOC program eligibility states that admission is guided by the provisions of Department Regulation No. OP-D-6. Program participants are: “Recommended by the Sentencing court and/or the positive recommendation of the Secretary or Designee; Sent independently by the court at time

³ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/transition-reentry/>: According to DOC language, “Each Regional Re-entry Program provides participants with the Standardized Pre-Release Curriculum 2010, two forms of identification, residence and employment plans, and connections to needed post-release resources in the community.”

⁴ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Catalog-of-Rehabilitation-Program-2021.pdf>, p. 32-34

⁵ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Catalog-of-Rehabilitation-Program-2021.pdf>, p. 32-34

⁶ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Catalog-of-Rehabilitation-Program-2021.pdf>, p. 32-34

⁷ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Catalog-of-Rehabilitation-Program-2021.pdf>, p. 32-34

of sentencing; or Sent by the sentencing court as a result of revocation for technical probation violation or by a Drug Court”.⁸ Further, the statutory requirements for alternative incarceration state that a program participant must be, “Convicted of a nonviolent first or second felony offense or Convicted of a first or second offense for [drug] possession... in violation of R.S. 40:967(B)(1) or R.S. 40:967(B)(4)(b) when the amount ... involved was twenty-eight grams or less.” Finally, their sentence must be less than ten years, and the woman must not be convicted of certain crimes of violence or any attempt.⁹ Although these treatment programs sound important for those inmates around the state who need help, there are strict suitability requirements that may exclude those with certain mental or physical health needs, outstanding criminal charges, or a history of “assaultive behavior”, or sex offenders.

LTCW Leadership

The previous Sheriff for Madison Parish, Sammie Byrd, was replaced this summer after losing the election by 22 votes (after a recount). He began in the Tallulah Police Department at 18, then 28 years at the Madison Parish Sheriff’s Office (along with his wife), left to work for the District Attorney,¹⁰ and eventually successfully ran for Sheriff in 2019. Sheriff Ezell, a former Detective with the Madison Parish Sheriff’s Office won the 2023 election for a four-year term and was sworn in June 2024.

Currently, Security Management, LLC. operates LTCW and also oversees the Madison Parish Correctional Center. The Madison Parish Correctional Center has been highlighted with concerns of negligence towards prison conditions¹¹, escapes¹², abuse¹³, and safety¹⁴. LTCW programming also has been operated by LaSalle Corrections. LaSalle operates several prisons in Louisiana. The company states that its, “range of facility solutions include design, construction, operations management, along with inmate services that cover security, education, rehabilitation, and healthcare.”¹⁵ Further, their website notes current management of 18 facilities with over 1,250 employees, leasing at least one facility to a law enforcement agency, and responsibility for over 13,000 inmates, combined.¹⁶ In Louisiana specifically, LaSalle’s footprint has included oversight of nearly one in seven Louisiana prisoners from the following facilities (as of 2020): “Catahoula Correctional Center in Harrisonburg (835 beds); Jackson Parish Correctional Center in Jonesboro (1252); LaSalle Correctional Center in Olla (755); Madison Parish Correctional Center in Tallulah (334); Madison Parish Detention Center in Tallulah (264); Madison Parish LTCW (formerly the Louisiana Transitional Center for Women) in Tallulah (535); River Correctional Center in Ferriday (602); Southern Correctional Center in Tallulah (564); and Winn Correctional Center in Winnfield (1576).”¹⁷ However, there is newsworthy coverage related to LaSalle’s prison operations in other sites and states that include complaints, legal proceedings and public

⁸ <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Catalog-of-Rehabilitation-Program-2021.pdf>, p. 32-34

⁹ R.S. 14:2(13)

¹⁰ <https://www.vicksburgpost.com/2008/12/06/new-roost-byrd-leaves-sheriffs-for-das-office/>

¹¹ <https://www.knoe.com/2024/01/28/family-incarcerated-local-detention-center-speak-out/>

¹² https://www.magnoliareporter.com/news_and_business/north_louisiana/article_4910021e-b6d6-11e8-8d5e-4397856329db.html

¹³ <https://www.knoe.com/2022/07/15/allegations-abuse-madison-parish-correctional-center/>

¹⁴

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/lawsuit-multiple-inmates-stabbed-at-louisiana-prison-where-guards-were-indifferent-to-safety/article_1c6edf38-35cb-11ec-a208-2f1f7eb9d93c.html

¹⁵ <https://lasallecorrections.com/what-we-do/#:~:text=LaSalle%20currently%20manages%2018%20facilities,to%20all%20of%20our%20partners.>

¹⁶ <https://lasallecorrections.com/what-we-do/#:~:text=LaSalle%20currently%20manages%2018%20facilities,to%20all%20of%20our%20partners.>

¹⁷

<https://louisianavoice.com/2020/09/17/whistleblowers-hysterectomy-complaint-on-lasalle-georgia-detention-center-has-strong-ruston-louisiana-connections/>

media attention. LaSalle's failure to provide medical care has become a common theme in information available online.¹⁸

Currently, Mr. Christopher Jay Stinson is the warden for LTCW. He retired with thirty years of service in corrections from Angola before moving into the private Corrections industry.¹⁹ His post-retirement career has been with different facility operations in Madison Parish. As warden over other facilities, Mr. Stinson has been named a Defendant by inmates in claims of civil rights violations. For example, Plaintiff Emile Charles who is a prisoner at Madison Parish Detention Center ("MPDC") alleged that Mr. Stinson, "in his individual capacity, failed to provide medical care," and ignored his requests for medical care. The Muslim inmate also alleged that he was fed pork against his religious practice.²⁰ Additionally, there have been recent calls to action for better treatment and conditions for inmates under Mr. Stinson's leadership of the Madison Parish Correctional Center. Social media posts note:

CALL TO ACTION: The situation at Madison Parish Correctional Center in Tallulah, Louisiana, is not just unacceptable; it's a horrific VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. Inmates have been surviving without clean drinking water for over a week. The facility's conditions are beyond deplorable, with non-functional toilets and sinks - conditions unfit even for animals, let alone human beings. Reports of rampant violence and torture within this privately-run facility are deeply disturbing. We're hearing about BEATINGS, STABBINGS, and inmates being SEVERELY BURNED and ASSAULTED by prison guards. This is not correction; it's blatant abuse and a gross misuse of power. This facility, owned by Jack Varner of Security Management LLC and overseen by Warden Chris Stinson, is failing its basic duty to provide humane living conditions. Yet, despite clear evidence, the warden dismisses these allegations as lies and fabrications. We must demand accountability and immediate action. Our voices can bring light to this injustice and push for the humane treatment of all inmates. Madison Parish Correctional Center: 158 Treatment Plant Road Tallulah, LA 71282 WARDEN CHRIS STINSON 318-574-1833 or 318-574-0584 DEMAND that Judges Brister and Claxton through court order stop sending inmates to this prison, until the prison makes immediate changes.²¹

Transparency and Requesting Public Record

The LTCW has minimum information available online for the public, including regarding the inmates housed there. There is no active website. There was no overall inmate population data or available or search tools. There is limited LaSalle operations information still posted on what inmate services might still be available under Security Management.²² There was no public briefing information on LTCW operations available online, and no further information provided by the City of Tallulah or Madison Parish. The only reports found were related to the overall state DOC regional re-entry program broadly, with some reference to programs hosted by LTCW for substance abuse and state basic jail guidelines certification reports. Advocacy concerns over prison conditions were primarily related to other LaSalle operations and other Madison Parish facilities.

The PRR filing was completed with assistance from Warden Stinson and Amy Varner. He was available to communicate by email to fulfill the request openly and without much delay. Initially the information was sent to Spam, but he was helpful in locating the requested LTCW PRR response. The 2020-2024 PRR provided contained information for the in-custody death of Bethany Holmes by overdose after she was found non-responsive on November 9, 2023, during

¹⁸ <https://truthout.org/articles/in-an-ominous-pattern-people-are-dying-once-transferred-to-louisiana-prison/>

¹⁹ <https://securitymgmt.net/about/>

²⁰ <https://casetext.com/case/charles-v-stinson>

²¹ <https://x.com/SirMaejorATL/status/1750638331606470688>

²² <https://lasallecorrections.com/reentry/>

evening rounds. This is the first reported LTCW in-custody death from 2014-2022. Ongoing documentation of inmate drug use and positive drug testing seems relevant to this first and recent LTCW death. For example, in July 2023, a third of the inmates called for mandatory drug testing were found positive.²³

Oversight and Conditions

There was no information found regarding additional oversight of LTCW by any national associations, local Madison Parish or City of Tallulah hearings, or judicial orders. Recent Department of Public Safety and Corrections BJC Recertification Reports for 2022 and 2023 maintained LTCW recertification for basic jail guidelines.²⁴ In 2022, overcrowding was noted. For the October inspection, there were 499 DOC offenders and 183 local offenders, 25% over capacity. However, in January 2023, the state granted Warden Stinson's request to increase capacity by 190 beds, from 548 to 738. LTCW was over operational capacity from housing other parish and pre-trial offenders. For the September 2023 inspection, there were 629 DOC and 157 local offenders. LTCW was noted to be holding the acceptance of additional DOC inmates until their prison population declined. During these inspections inmates voiced concerns about staff failure to hold sick call in a timely manner in 2022, and lack of enough food in 2023, however, this was dismissed both BJC reports. Both inspections showed ongoing positive drug tests for offenders on a monthly basis.

For notable LTCW cases or complaints on conditions in the last 5 years, inmate Plaintiff *Natalie Williams v. Louisiana Transitional Center for Women, et al.* claimed that:

"there is an infestation of black colored mold growing on the walls and coming out of the vents." [doc. # 1, p. 3]. There is black mold on her sheets. *Id.* She has written "the warehouse for more sheets [,]" but she has not received a response. *Id.* She is "not offered cleaning supplies on a daily basis." *Id.* She alleges that she is at risk of exposure to the black mold. [doc. # 7, p. 1]. Plaintiff claims that the space in which she is confined smells of bleach and mold. [doc. # 1, p. 3]. Plaintiff claims that the water in the sink, shower, and water fountain is contaminated with a brown substance. *Id.* She alleges that the brown contaminants in the water caused rashes on her "right inner and upper thigh." [doc. # 7, p. 1]. Plaintiff claims that since August 18, 2021, she has been denied daily recreation. [doc. #s 1, p. 3; 7, p. 2]. She is allowed outside approximately twice each month. [doc. # 1, p. 3]. The lack of recreation caused her to develop acid reflux, which renders it difficult for her to keep "anything down especially at night." [doc. # 7, p. 1]. She is "confined 24 hours a day to a shared living space with no movement unless during meal times." *Id.* at 2. Plaintiff claims that she has not "been assigned to any classes to help better [her] for society." *Id.* Plaintiff claims that she is not receiving proper medical attention when she is seen by the nurse. [doc. # 7, p. 1]. She states that she was sentenced to 15 years of incarceration, but she has "not spoken with any counselors [or] life coaches" *Id.* at 2. Plaintiff claims that there "are no ARP forms in the housing unit." [doc. # 1, p. 3]. Plaintiff seeks release from confinement, a transfer to a state prison, and "repayment[.]" [doc. #s 1, p. 4; 7, p. 2].

Besides this recent complaint, the most newsworthy story was about an LTCW employee who helped a pregnant inmate by caring for her newborn baby after it was delivered. The employee lost her job, but the stories were mostly in admiration for her compassion for the inmate and baby.²⁵

²³ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2023.11.13-LTCW-BJG-Audit.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2023.11.13-LTCW-BJG-Audit.pdf>

²⁵ <https://mississippitoday.org/2023/08/11/roberta-bell-raised-baby-of-incarcerated-woman/>;
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/07/15/corrections-officer-baby-fired-louisiana/>