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Assignment #3
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Memo on River Correctional Center

River Correctional Center is located in Ferriday, Louisiana at 26362 LA Highway 15. It originally opened in 2001 and is currently privately operated by LaSalle Corrections. LaSalle Corrections oversees 18 facilities located in Louisiana, Texas, and Georgia. They are a “family operation” committed to integrity, dignity, and professionalism. LaSalle Corrections has over 1,250 employees and a total inmate capacity of over 13,000. River Correctional Center houses about 600 male immigrants, with a daily average of about 349, who have cases pending at LaSalle Immigration Court. It should also be noted that River Correctional center is not a dedicated ICE facility. Other than available capacity, there is no further population data available such as racial/gender composition within the facility, but there is a good faith belief that the Center houses only men. While there is no website specific to River Correctional Center, there is a website for LaSalle Corrections which provides brief overviews about the facilities they run and the services they provide within these facilities. LaSalle makes approximately \$65 per day per bed from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is notably lower than the standard \$24.39 from the Department of Corrections. Other than this information, I could not find any reports on their annual budget or financing available to the public.

Since 2015, there have been 18 deaths at the facility with reasons spanning from “Drugs” and “Medical” to “Violence” and “Accident.” However, there was one death in 2017 which was ruled as a “Suicide.” Majority of the deaths occurred due to “Medical” reasons, which can mean any number of things, but I hope none of them were preventable. Out of these 18 deaths, 5 of them have occurred since 2020, which incidentally were NOT included in LaSalle’s response to my Public Records Request. After submitting my request, I was told by LaSalle personnel that “there are no records responsive to” my request. Additionally, upon request for a Zero Deaths Letter, I was also told that the response to my previous email complies with the statutes included in my original request. This tells me that my request was not taken seriously, and LaSalle had no interest in providing me with the requested death information of their detainees within the stated time period.

Although River Correctional Center is privately owned and operated, this does not mean they are not subject to oversight by national associations and administrations. The Center operates under the Performance-Based National Detention Standards of 2011 (revised in 2016). Additionally, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Professional Responsibility and Detention Oversight conducted a compliance inspection of River Correctional Center in November 2022. It is noted that during the last inspection, the Office of Detention Oversight (ODO) found 13 deficiencies in Correspondence and Other Mail, Personal Hygiene, Staff-Detainee Communication, and their Voluntary Work Program. In the more recent report, deficiencies were found in areas of Safety, Security, and Care. Specifically, there were issues

with Land Transportation (4), Funds and Personal Property (1), Use of Force and Restraints (1), Significant Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention and Intervention (2), and Terminal Illness, Advance Directives and Death (1). However, even amidst these deficiencies, the ODO interviewed 43 detainees and none of them made allegations of discrimination, mistreatment, or abuse; most of those who were interviewed reported satisfaction with facility services, with a few exceptions. First, one detainee complained of his denied use of the law library and legal materials. Second, several individuals complained of lack of medical care, such as no follow-up appointments, prescriptions not working, and requesting specific medical treatment such as a tooth extraction. Further details regarding these found deficiencies and complaints can be found in the Department of Homeland Security ODO Compliance Inspection from November 2022. In the end, the ODO rated the facility as “Superior,” a step up from their previous rating of “Good.”

After conducting research, I found that River Correctional Facility, and more specifically LaSalle Corrections, has a deficit when it comes to transparency with the public. There is a lack of public briefings made from LaSalle about operations of the facility and their website contains very little information specific to the 18 separate locations they oversee. They do not have their own inmate locator, but do refer families (via their website) to each respective state’s portal for finding where a loved one is held. There are some articles published reporting on news and complaints such as strikes (as seen below) by advocacy groups, but this is probably due to the size of the facility and the nature of those held there. Overall, my assessment of their transparency is low, considering the information and responses I received for my Public Records Request and the lack of information available online via their website and through conducting my own research.

In 2019, there was a hunger strike at River Correctional Center which consisted of about 150 people and lasted for 8 days. The strike was one of 6 at the time and complaints relating to the strike consisted of inmates being denied bond and a sense of unfairness at hearings. More recently, there have been complaints of hearings being consistently rescheduled and a struggle to find basic supplies and necessities due to a lack of interpreters available to inmates. In a report by RFK Human Rights, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Southeast Dignity Not Detention Coalition, one case details the LaSalle Immigration Court rescheduling a hearing date for a 22-year-old Ethiopian man eight times because it could not find an interpreter. The same man complains of struggle to request mental health care services and basic supplies, including new underwear, because he was not provided with adequate translation services while detained at River Correctional Center.

To conclude, while River Correctional Center, under the supervision of LaSalle Corrections, clearly has some issues with transparency, one can find some solace in reading the ICE Compliance Inspection Report in concluding that the facility has a “superior” rating under the Performance-Based National Detention Standards of 2011. Although the majority of complaints and deaths seem to stem from medical issues, this can most likely be remedied by either a change in medical staffing or stronger legislation. The downfall is that stronger

legislation comes from transparency with the public, which is lacking here. LaSalle should be held just as accountable, if not more than, another state-run facility because they are privately operated and by nature are subject to less oversight by government administrations, leading way to an increased number of deficiencies.