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FROM: Mackenzie Griffith
RE: Facility Memo- Winn Correctional Center
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WINN CORRECTIONAL CENTER MEMORANDUM

Introduction

Winn Parish is one of sixty-four parishes in Louisiana's north-central region. As of 2023, it has an estimated population of 13,216 people spread out over 957 square miles.¹ In November 2023, after a close election and a recount by hand, Josh McAllister was chosen as the new Sheriff for Winn Parish, beating out incumbent Cranford Jordan Jr. by 17 votes.² Jordan served three terms as Sheriff, beginning in 2012, and had been a deputy on the force since 1973.³ Based on Josh McAllister's campaign page, he has no previous experience with law enforcement or criminal justice.⁴ After a brief stint in the oil and gas industry, McAllister began working for his family's logging business in 2006 and eventually became vice president in 2011.⁵ In 2016, he was elected to the Winn Parish Police Jury and eventually ran unopposed to become its president.⁶ His main responsibilities included being the chief elected official in an emergency "to ensure the safety and well-being of all the citizens within the parish."⁷ McAllister was sworn in as Sheriff on June 30, 2024.⁸

Jail Characteristics and History

Winn Correctional Center was opened in 1990 as the first privately run medium-security prison in the United States.⁹ The Louisiana Department of Corrections originally used the facility.¹⁰ However, today, it is almost solely used for ICE detention.¹¹ The facility is located at 560 Gum Springs Road, Winnfield, LA 71483, and is divided into five housing units- Ash, Birch, Cypress, Dogwood, and Elm. The facility has a maximum capacity of 1,576 detainees; on average, it has a total population of 1,455.¹²

In 2015, the facility was operated by the private prison company Corrections Corporations of America (now CoreCivic) until *Mother Jones* journalist Shane Bauer went undercover for four

¹ https://data.census.gov/profile/Winn_Pa...?g=050XX00US22127

² <https://www.knoe.com/2023/12/01/new-winn-parish-sheriff-elect-confirmed-after-recount-nov-18-voting-ballots/>

³ <https://winnsheriff.org/our-sheriff>

⁴ <https://www.winntogether.com/bio>. The Winn Parish Sheriff's Office website has not been updated since 2023 and does not contain information about the current administration.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ <https://winnparishjournal.com/josh-mcallister-sworn-in-as-winn-parish-sheriff/>

⁹ <https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2015/sep/03/winn-private-launch/>. MuckRock's Private Prison Project contains multiple FOIRs for Winn Correctional Center, including requests for coroner's reports, which the parish has routinely refused to provide.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ <https://cbs6albany.com/news/nation-world/louisiana-becomes-new-hub-in-immigrant-detention-under-trump>

¹² https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/prea_audit/WinnCorrCntr_Apr5-7_2022.pdf;

https://www.laaclu.org/sites/default/files/inside_the_black_hole_systemic_human_rights_abuses_against_immigrant_s_detained_disappeared_in_louisiana.pdf

months as a guard there.¹³ Bauer would go on to release a scathing documentary about the horrifically dangerous conditions created by the private company's policies.¹⁴ Two weeks after Bauer left the facility in 2015, CoreCivic voided its contract with the Department of Corrections, and LaSalle Corrections took over control in September of that year.¹⁵ La Salle reopened the facility to primarily house ICE detainees.¹⁶ According to a representative for the DOC, it has not operated at the facility since 2017. However, the Office of Enforcement and Removal did not begin housing immigration detainees at the facility until 2019, so it is unclear what happened in between those times.¹⁷

Leadership and Oversight

Winn Correctional Center is now operated by La Salle Corrections as well as the Winn Parish Sheriff's Office.¹⁸ According to the new Sheriff's profile, the warden of the facility is Eleazar Garcia.¹⁹ The warden manages daily facility operations and support personnel, while La Salle Corrections provides food services and medical care.²⁰ The facility operates under the Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) 2011 (Revised 2016).²¹ The National Commission accredited the facility on Correction Health Care in August 2022.²² In April 2022, it was audited and certified under the Department of Homeland Security Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).²³

The ICE Office of Detention Oversight has conducted two unannounced compliance inspections of the Winn Correctional Center in 2023 and 2024.²⁴ In 2023, the facility was evaluated for compliance with twenty-four standards and found to be deficient in five categories, with eleven deficiencies overall.²⁵ According to the report, ODO received a completed UCAP for the facility in July 2023, which likely resolved the deficiencies ODO found during that inspection.²⁶ However, since the first inspection in 2023, the facility's overall compliance with PBNDS has "trended downwards."²⁷

The 2024 inspection, which was conducted between January 23-25, found the facility was deficient in twelve out of twenty-nine standards, with thirty-two total deficiencies found.²⁸ These included Environmental Health and Safety, Security, Detainee Care, and Telephone Access

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<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/06/cca-private-prisons-corrections-corporation-inmates-investigation-bauer/>

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ <https://cbs6albany.com/news/nation-world/louisiana-becomes-new-hub-in-immigrant-detention-under-trump>

¹⁷ https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/winnCorrCntr_WinnfieldLA_Jan23-25_2024.pdf

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ <https://lsa.org/directory/winn-parish/>

²⁰ https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/winnCorrCntr_WinnfieldLA_Jan23-25_2024.pdf

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.* at 13.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

deficiencies.²⁹ According to the report, most of the housing units had an insufficient shower-to-detainee ratio (1:12), and the shower temperatures measured far below the 100-degree Fahrenheit standard.³⁰ Housing units also experienced heating and cooling system problems prior to and during the inspection.³¹ They also found issues with sanitation and general cleanliness, noting mold-like stains in most shower areas, roof damage, and significant condensation forming on the housing units' walls, ceilings, and floors.³² The inspection also found that in 2 out of 5 units, there was only one operable telephone per 48 detainees, as opposed to the standard 1:25.³³ Other issues found included deficiencies in food storage and service, a lack of security for detainee property, insufficient access to medical care, missing information in detainee files, and a lack of staff training in several categories.

Public Records Requests and Inmate Mortality

Records requests made this year did not uncover any data relating to inmate/detainee mortality at Winn. Originally, a records request was sent to the Louisiana Department of Corrections after the facility stated they did not have any records relating to the DOC on site. After some time, a representative for the DOC stated that according to their attorney, the DOC had not operated at Winn since 2017, and any request must be sent to the facility directly. The facility responded to such a request by stating that they did not have any records responsive to the request.

Previous records requests had uncovered a total of eight deaths at the facility since 2015.³⁴ Six of the recorded deaths were from medical problems/natural causes, and one was reported as suicide.³⁵ There was one death that was reportedly caused by drug use, but the summary of the events described shows that the inmate only died after repeated and prolonged use of force by several guards at the facility.³⁶

Other research has discovered the deaths of two ICE detainees at Winn Correctional. The first, in 2020, was related to the Covid-19 pandemic.³⁷ The other detainee passed earlier this year after months of being ill, with extreme symptoms, including coughing up large amounts of blood.³⁸ His death led to increased concerns about a lack of adequate medical care in the facility.³⁹

News Coverage and Transparency

²⁹ *Id.* at 6.

³⁰ *Id.* at 7.

³¹ *Id.* at 13.

³² *Id.* at 8.

³³ *Id.* at 13.

³⁴ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/la-prison-deaths/winn/>

³⁵ *Id.* One of the deaths is stated to have occurred in 2020, but the record is from the Louisiana Department of Corrections, which was supposedly not operating at the facility at that time.

³⁶ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Millen-Don-Winn-2020.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.aila.org/files/o-files/view-file/41E1DF2D-225D-45A8-95A2-7A82DA7BC94B>

³⁸

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/asylum-seeker-died-ice-custody-was-sick-months-advocates-fear-ill-peop-rcna151631>

³⁹ *Id.*

Since reopening as an ICE detention center, the facility has continued to be plagued by reports of human and civil rights violations, and there have been repeated calls by advocates to have the facility shut down completely. A recent article from the Louisiana ACLU discussing immigration detention in the state reported dozens of different abuses occurring at Winn Correctional Center, including the arbitrary use of solitary confinement.⁴⁰ The report alleges that Winn officials locked one man in prolonged solitary confinement for filing complaints of sexual violence and harassment, and people who requested medication for ailments have been threatened with solitary for “asking too many questions” when medical staff came to the housing unit.⁴¹ A Russian LGBTQ+ man at Winn was held in administrative segregation for three weeks for his purported protection.⁴² During his solitary confinement, he was denied law library access and was only able to call his family twice.⁴³

In relation to the level of medical care available at the facility, the ACLU addresses several reported incidents. Officials at Winn allegedly told one man whose diabetes caused vision loss that left him unable to read, write, or navigate his surroundings to treat his condition by purchasing glasses at the commissary.⁴⁴ Another man with chronic kidney disease whose limbs had swollen so much that he lost the ability to walk was told: “It will likely take six months for ICE to schedule the appointment with a specialist.”⁴⁵ Officials confiscated a wheelchair the man had previously received and refused him crutches, forcing him to rely on other detained people to carry him to the bathroom and the cafeteria.⁴⁶

In July 2021, an Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties investigation led them to recommend that Winn “be closed or drawn down” in light of a “culture and conditions that can lead to abuse, mistreatment, and discrimination.”⁴⁷ However, despite ICE stating it was going to limit the use of the jail voluntarily, Winn’s population has ballooned to near maximum capacity, and systemic human rights abuses there persist.⁴⁸ By September 2024, the CRCL had received another 120 complaints of civil rights violations at Winn, prompting an announcement that it would be commencing another on-site investigation of the facility “to address systemic civil rights concerns.”⁴⁹ Forty-two of the allegations involved excessive or inappropriate force by facility staff, physical and verbal misconduct by ICE and/or facility personnel, and inadequate conditions of detention explicitly related to environmental health and food service concerns.⁵⁰

⁴⁰https://www.laclu.org/sites/default/files/inside_the_black_hole_systemic_human_rights_abuses_against_immigrants_detained_disappeared_in_louisiana.pdf

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

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https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/24_0905_crcl_retention-memo-winn-correctional-center-redacted_508.pdf

⁵⁰ *Id.*

The CRCL memo addresses six specific complaints. First, in March, CRCL received allegations from six NGOs that ICE and its contractors at Winn attacked approximately 200 people with pepper spray.⁵¹ On January 26, 2024, detainees were attacked by officers after declaring a mass hunger strike to protest conditions of confinement and denials of release.⁵² The officers walked around dousing the dorm for five minutes, indiscriminately spraying detainees directly in their faces and on their bodies, including those who were fleeing and attempting to hide, as well as individuals with chronic medical conditions.⁵³ Officers then allegedly exited and locked the doors and windows, turned off cameras in the unit, and cut power and water to the unit, denying noncitizens the ability to rinse their eyes, throats, and skin.⁵⁴ The noncitizens remained locked in their cells without access to medical care for approximately three hours.⁵⁵

Next, on April 26, 2024, the office received allegations that a female officer told a noncitizen that in order to get his missing legal documents, he must get down on his knees and beg for them.⁵⁶ In April, CRCL also received correspondence on behalf of a noncitizen in custody at Winn, alleging that three ICE officers used excessive force to obtain the individual's signature and fingerprint on a deportation warrant after he told them that he did not understand and requested that the document be translated to Spanish.⁵⁷ Allegedly, one officer pushed the noncitizen in the chest before grabbing his hand and twisting his arm back, while Officer #2 grabbed his other arm and Officer # 3 rushed over, grabbed him by his neck, and began choking him, at which point the detainee began losing consciousness and then became silent. The ICE officers did not let him go until they forcibly obtained his fingerprint.⁵⁸

The other complaints include allegations that noncitizens at Winn were served expired milk with each meal on February 23, 2024, after officers threatened that if they didn't drink the milk, fresh milk would not be ordered.⁵⁹ Many detainees became ill from the milk. On March 11, 2024, CRCL received correspondence from the brother of a noncitizen in ICE custody at Winn, alleging that the facility has no air conditioning, hot water, or translation services.⁶⁰ Finally, on January 23, 2023, CRCL received allegations made by a noncitizen in ICE custody at Winn, stating that he and other noncitizens were placed into a "freezer", where ICE officers made racist and derogatory comments at the group.⁶¹ After exiting the freezer, one of the officers refused the complainant's request for a phone call and forced him down on all fours, making him crawl back

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² https://www.laclu.org/sites/default/files/inside_the_black_hole_systemic_human_rights_abuses_against_immigrants_detained_disappeared_in_louisiana.pdf

⁵³ Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, *supra* note 37.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

to his cell.⁶² Another officer allegedly threatened to place the complainant in solitary after he said he was going to raise his facility-related concerns to a national news outlet.⁶³

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*