

**TO:** Professors Erica Navalance and Nishi Kumar

**FROM:** Tyler Kennemore

**RE:** Facility Memorandum

**Date:** December 29, 2024

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## **Dixon Correctional Institute**

### **Introduction**

The Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) directly operates eight correctional facilities across the state. Additionally, the DOC houses incarcerated individuals in private, local, and parish jails and prisons throughout Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> Individuals incarcerated in DOC custody are serving prison sentences for felony convictions. As of August 31, 2024, there are 29,239 people incarcerated in DOC custody, 15,433 of which are in local facilities, while 13,806 are in state facilities.<sup>2</sup> Dixon Correctional Institute (DCI) is a DOC facility located in Jackson, Louisiana in East Feliciana Parish and is under the supervision of Warden Edward “Dusty” Bickham.<sup>3</sup>

### **Prison Characteristics**

Dixon Correctional Institute is a multi-security level facility located at 5568 LA-68, Jackson, LA 70748 on a 3,000 acre site. DCI was initially opened in 1976 as the first satellite facility constructed after the decentralization of the Louisiana State Penitentiary.<sup>4</sup> As a Department of Corrections facility, DCI houses individuals convicted of felony offenses, generally for extended sentences. More than 70% of those incarcerated at DCI are serving sentences of longer than ten years. The current operational capacity of DCI is 1,800 and the incarcerated population as of September 30, 2024 is 1,634.<sup>5</sup>

DCI houses only male inmates. 1,112 of these (68.1%) are black, while 512 (31.3%) are white. The remaining 10 (0.6%) are members of other races. The largest age group at DCI is comprised of persons forty to forty-four years of age, at 228 individuals. Following closely behind, at 226 persons, are those thirty to thirty-four years old. Currently, one inmate is less than seventeen years old.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, while the majority of DCI’s incarcerated population is designated medium security, 7.5% of beds are classified as maximum security.<sup>7</sup>

DCI states its mission as “provid[ing] for custody, care, control, and treatment of adjudicated people in prison through enforcement of laws and management of programs designed to ensure the safety of the public, staff, and imprisoned people.” DCI also proclaims goals of providing basic services to victims of crimes, ensuring adequate necessities are provided

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<sup>1</sup> Facility Directory, Department of Corrections,

<https://doc.louisiana.gov/about-the-dpsc/facility-locations/>

<sup>2</sup> Demographic Dashboard, Department of Corrections, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/demographic-dashboard/>

<sup>3</sup> Dixon Correctional Institute, Department of Corrections, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/dixon-correctional-institute/>

<sup>4</sup> Executive Budget Review, Department of Corrections, 41, [https://www.house.louisiana.gov/housefiscal/DOCS\\_APP\\_BDGT\\_MEETINGS/DOCS\\_AppBudgetMeetings2023/FY%2024%20Department%20of%20Corrections.pdf](https://www.house.louisiana.gov/housefiscal/DOCS_APP_BDGT_MEETINGS/DOCS_AppBudgetMeetings2023/FY%2024%20Department%20of%20Corrections.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*; Demographic Dashboard, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/demographic-dashboard/>

<sup>6</sup> Demographic Dashboard, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/demographic-dashboard/>

<sup>7</sup> Dixon, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/dixon-correctional-institute/>

to incarcerated offenders, and promoting the opportunity for positive change in behavior.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, DCI offers a variety of programs for incarcerated people, including educational and vocational classes, as well as various assistance programs designed to provide aid with substance abuse recovery, rehabilitation, and reentry.<sup>9</sup>

In-person visitations are allowed but are subject to restrictions that vary based on offender security level. Generally, incarcerated individuals at DCI are limited to two visits per month per approved visitor. Visits are limited to two hours in duration and may include up to four visitors, including children. Visitors are subject to search by prison staff and are required to comply with a visitor dress code. During visitation for those in extended lockdown, no physical contact is permitted. Further limitations for extended lockdown offenders are as follows: For those designated level 3 security, visits are limited to one hour and three visitors; Level 2 incarcerated people are allowed only two visitors for one hour; Level 1 offenders may receive two visitors for only thirty minutes.<sup>10</sup>

The existing operating budget of DCI, as of October 1, 2024, is \$69,013,161. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, \$46,409,838 of this budget was expended on employee salaries, benefits, and other compensation to its 463 personnel.<sup>11</sup> The most recent available report conveys that during the 2022-2023 fiscal year, the total cost per offender per day was \$86.57.<sup>12</sup>

### **Public Records Request and Inmate Mortality**

#### **i) Public Records Requests**

Information regarding the submission of public records requests is available on the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections website. The webpage provides a physical address to which requests may be sent, a fax number, as well as an email address dedicated to communications respecting public records. Also included is information relating to the type of requests which may be sent and what records are not public.<sup>13</sup>

The process of submitting a public records request through to the DOC is relatively simple. Emailing a copy of a request pertaining to deaths in custody to the email address provided resulted in a prompt response within an hour acknowledging receipt. La Rev. Stat. § 44:32 provides that, if the custodian of records wishes to raise questions about its status as public, they shall do so within five business days of receipt of the request.<sup>14</sup> However, after further correspondence and 19 days, DOC Administrative Program Specialist Rachel Escobar responded with a denial of the request, claiming the requested information was exempt and confidential. After re-urging the request and rebutting the claims of exemption and confidentiality, a simple email with the number of deaths was received from Ms. Escobar. No records or any attached documents were provided with this email, but the text of the email merely stated, “The number of deaths of inmates in custody from January 1, 2020- present day:

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<sup>8</sup> Executive Budget Supporting Document, Corrections Services, 134 (2009), [https://www.doa.la.gov/media/qlnj3fhg/08a\\_corrections\\_services.pdf](https://www.doa.la.gov/media/qlnj3fhg/08a_corrections_services.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Dixon, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/dixon-correctional-institute/>

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Agency Budget Request, Corrections Services, 16 (2024), [https://www.doa.la.gov/media/3vjgkpr2/fy26\\_agency\\_budget\\_request\\_409.pdf](https://www.doa.la.gov/media/3vjgkpr2/fy26_agency_budget_request_409.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Budget and Cost Data Summary, DPS&C. Human. Resources, 1, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/0d-Budget-Human-Resources-PE-Website.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Public Records Requests, Department of Corrections, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/public-programs-resources/public-information/>

<sup>14</sup> La. Rev. Stat. § 44:32, <https://legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?p=y&d=99691>

DCI-60.” After more communications again insisting upon receiving public records, DOC attorney Erin St. Pierre provided a copy of a spreadsheet with information relating to each death at DCI during the requested timeframe. From the time the request was initially submitted (September 5, 2024) to the time the requested information was received (November 14, 2024), 70 days passed.

ii) Inmate Mortality

The Corrections website contains an interactive page providing brief information relating to deaths in custody at DOC facilities. While the information provided furnishes a useful cursory overview, for more detailed and up to date information about deaths in custody, records must be received from the DOC.<sup>15</sup> According to a DCI death report received November 14, 2024, pursuant to a public records request, 59 incarcerated people died in DCI custody between January 1, 2020 and August 8, 2024. The manner of death constituting the largest plurality was cancer, at eleven deaths. Ten individuals died of COVID during this timeframe.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, at least one further inmate death has occurred at DCI since DOC website information has been updated and subsequent to the compilation of information for the aforementioned death report. According to the East Feliciana Parish Sheriff’s Office, Cornelius Kelly, a 39 year old inmate at DCI was stabbed to death on the morning of November 5, 2024 by one or more other inmates.<sup>17</sup>

**Evidence of Oversight and Transparency**

DCI received accreditation from the American Correctional Association (ACA) in August of 1993. DCI’s Administration Program, authorized by Louisiana statute (R.S. 15:821-840.2; R.S. 36:401-409), is responsible for maintaining ACA accreditation. In addition to maintaining accreditation, the Administration Program provides for the management of personnel, expenditures, and facility program operations at DCI. Stated goals of the administration program include (1) effectively managing available resources, (2) ensuring maximum utilization of resources, and (3) avoiding budget deficits. The existing operating budget of the Administration Program was \$5,865,343 as of December 1, 2023.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to ACA monitoring, DCI has been subject to oversight through Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) audits. The most recent available audit individualized to DCI was conducted in 2021. Auditor William Peck found that DCI met all standards (but did not exceed any) imposed by the PREA. Relevant signage was present and proper procedure was followed.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned, the DOC website offers a variety of services relating to prison data. As well as prison demographics relating to the number, ethnicity, location, and other statistics of incarcerated people, an inmate locator is available through Vinelink.<sup>20</sup> Some limited advocacy group reports and research related to DCI is available, such as previous memoranda and

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<sup>15</sup> Death Dashboard, Department of Corrections, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/death-dashboards/>

<sup>16</sup> DCI Deaths Report, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1efg4WL-G5r6813T1v0YLZA0DIAZbty-r>

<sup>17</sup> Inmate Dies After Being Stabbed at Dixon Correctional Institute, WAFB, <https://www.wafb.com/2024/11/05/inmate-dies-after-being-stabbed-dixon-correctional-institute/>; Inmate Stabbed, Killed at Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson, WGNO, <https://wgno.com/news/louisiana/sheriffs-office-inmate-stabbed-killed-at-dixon-correctional-institute-in-jackson/>

<sup>18</sup> Executive Budget Supporting Document, Corrections Services, 79 (2024), <https://doa.la.gov/media/du5majil/correctionsservices.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> DCI PREA Audit, 2021, 9, 17-18, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Dixon-Correctional-Institute-Audit-Report-2021.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Locate Imprisoned Person, Vinelink, <https://vinelink.vineapps.com/search/LA/Person>

presentation material for Professor Armstrong's Loyola University of New Orleans Incarceration Seminar.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, a handful of notable cases have arisen from DCI in recent years. Poor safety conditions and employee corruption at DCI have been highlighted, particularly in 2024. In May of 2024, a "\$90K Contraband Smuggling Operation" was uncovered, leading to the arrest of 9 individuals, including inmates, civilians, and DCI employees.<sup>22</sup> In late 2024, multiple inmates contracted tuberculosis, allegedly originating from a foreign detainee at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center, and were forced into isolation. While DCI officials state that no outbreak occurred, they suspended inmate transfers to and from the prison.<sup>23</sup> A Dixon correctional officer was convicted for the battery of an inmate and sentenced to one year of probation in November, 2024 after investigators found that he wrongfully punched the incarcerated man.<sup>24</sup> Also in November, the fatal stabbing of Cornelius Kelly occurred, for which four his fellow prisoners have been indicted and are currently awaiting trial.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dixon Correctional Institute, Incarceration Transparency, <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/la-prison-deaths/east-feliciano/dixon-correctional-institute/>

<sup>22</sup> Prison Contraband Smuggling Investigation, Louisiana State Police, <https://lsp.org/community-outreach/news/prison-contraband-smuggling-investigation-leads-to-multiple-arrests/>

<sup>23</sup> Inmate preliminarily tests positive for TB at Dixon Correctional, <https://www.wafb.com/2024/10/25/doc-inmate-preliminarily-tests-positive-tb-dixon-correctional/>

<sup>24</sup> Dixon Correctional Officer Sentenced for Battery, The Advocate, [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/news/courts/dixon-officer-guilty-plea/article\\_52f95c7a-a37f-11ef-930d-5fb87e2a1b6f.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/courts/dixon-officer-guilty-plea/article_52f95c7a-a37f-11ef-930d-5fb87e2a1b6f.html)

<sup>25</sup> Inmate Dies After Being Stabbed at Dixon Correctional Institute; Inmate Stabbed, Killed at Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson