

TO: Professor Navalance and Professor Kumar

FROM: Ryan O'Connor

RE: "Better Know a Jail" Memo

DATE: December 13, 2024

Catahoula Correctional Center Memorandum

Introduction

Catahoula Correctional Center is located on 499 Old Columbia Rd. Harrisonburg, Louisiana 71340 in Catahoula Parish.¹ The location is a little Northwest of Alexandria and Southwest of Monroe. Catahoula Correctional center houses inmates who have already been incarcerated and for them to serve their sentences. Catahoula Correctional Center was opened back in June of 1999 and was originally owned by LaSalle Corrections before being sold to Sheriff Toney Edwards.²

Jail Oversight and Leadership

Catahoula Parish elected Toney Edwards as their new Sheriff back in 2023.³ Catahoula Correctional Center is supervised by Warden Pat Book.⁴ Pat Book comes from a family that has been involved in the prison system for years.⁵ Pat Book's father, Ronnie Book, was elected Sheriff of Catahoula Parish in 1999.⁶ Pat Book, the current Warden at Catahoula Correctional Center, has a reputation of being violent and a reputation of running a terrible operation. One person stated, "The warden, Pat Book, runs a terrible prison operation."⁷ While his father, Ronnie Book was sheriff, Pat Book was under investigation for cracking the skull of an inmate in his office.⁸ In March of 2003, an ethics complaint was filed against Sheriff Ronnie Book because his son, Pat Book, was employed at a correctional facility and was also a part owner of a company which supplied the jail with drinks, snacks, and toiletries.⁹ It is safe to say that the Book family has a lot of dirt on them, and they have been in positions of power in the prison system for a few decades now.

¹ <https://catahoulaso.com/catahoula-correctional-center/>

² <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/CatahoulaCCHarrisonburgLAJuly2020.pdf>

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<https://louisianavoices.com/2022/11/30/stabbing-death-the-latest-incident-to-mar-image-of-catahoula-corrections-center-with-history-of-administrative-problems/>

⁴ <https://catahoulaso.com/catahoula-correctional-center/>

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<https://louisianavoices.com/2022/11/30/stabbing-death-the-latest-incident-to-mar-image-of-catahoula-corrections-center-with-history-of-administrative-problems/>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

Jail Characteristics

Catahoula Correctional Center has a capacity of nine hundred inmates¹⁰, but as of July 20, 2020, they had a population of two hundred and twenty-seven, all of whom are males.¹¹ There has not been an updated population count since 2020, and there was very little regarding Catahoula Correctional Center's operations on their website.¹² The Correctional Center consists of nine dormitory style housing units with each unit has around sixty-four to one hundred and eight beds.¹³ The population inside of the prison rises from time to time due to the evacuation of other prisons due to hurricanes in the area.¹⁴ Catahoula Correctional Center has a special management unit (SMU) which has ten cells.¹⁵ Two cells are used for suicide observation, and they have a one bed in them.¹⁶ The other eight cells have two beds each, and these cells are used for administrative or disciplinary segregation status.¹⁷

Public Records Request and Inmate Mortality

When I contacted Catahoula Correctional Center requesting the records of deaths of inmates in custody from January 1, 2020, till present day, I first began my investigation by directly calling the Correctional Center. They originally told me to send the request through the mail then the request. So, I mailed them the request on September 6. After not hearing back for two weeks, I called them again on September 20. They claimed that they did not have the information that I needed, but they transferred me to someone who may. I was then put into a game of phone tag. I talked to about four or five different people, and each one kept transferring me to a new person because no one that I talked to was able to answer a public records request. I called back again on October 7, and I was transferred to four or five different people again. After a few transfers, I finally got in touch with the Clerk of Court, and she said they do not keep those records and to call a different number. I then called the new number, but there was just a loud pitch sound on the other line. I emailed the Clerk of Court to explain the situation in writing. The Clerk of Court told me to email a lady named Pam to get my public records request fulfilled. I emailed Pam (pam_cpso@att.net) and Sheriff Toney Edwards (toney_cpso@att.net). I have followed up with Pam multiple times, but I have still not received a response.

Unfortunately, I do not have any records regarding the information of deaths of inmates in custody from January 1, 2020, till present day. I hope they will respond in the coming days, but it was terrible communication on their end from the start of this process. Although I have not received any documents from Catahoula Correctional Center regarding death information, I have done outside researched and have found that at least three inmates have died since January 1,

¹⁰ <https://catahoulaso.com/catahoula-correctional-center/>

¹¹ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/CatahoulaCCHarrisonburgLAJuly2020.pdf>

¹² <https://catahoulaso.com/catahoula-correctional-center/>

¹³ https://www.ice.gov/doclib/facilityInspections/CatahoulaCorrCtrn_CL_11-9-2020.pdf

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

2020. One was shot by an officer in 2024¹⁸, one was stabbed multiple times in 2022¹⁹, and one had a heart attack in 2020.²⁰ All of these incidents are discussed in greater detail in the Jail News Coverage and Transparency section below.

Jail News Coverage and Transparency

There have been multiple stories recently in the news that have involved inmates dying or being killed on the Catahoula Correctional Center's watch. In May of 2024, during an inmate transfer, there was an inmate in the back of the van who was faking a seizure.²¹ When the officers pulled to the side of the road to offer the inmate help, the inmate lunged and attacked the officers, and the inmate got a hold of one of the officer's guns.²² The other officer immediately shot the inmate to protect himself, the other officer, and the other inmate who remained in the van.²³ Catahoula Correctional Center was in the news as recent as November 8, 2024 when Christopher Williams, an inmate at Catahoula Correctional Center, escaped from the facility, but was captured shortly after.²⁴

In November of 2018, there was an investigation that was launched due to Kevin Percle, an inmate at the time, being found dead in his cell.²⁵ In October of 2018, Kevin Percle was transferred to Catahoula Correctional Center.²⁶ He suffered a hit to the head from an incident with another inmate.²⁷ Two weeks later, he was transferred to Lafourche Parish Detention Center because of his impending court date.²⁸ On November 12, correctional officers found Kevin Percle unresponsive in his cell, and he was later announced dead after being taken to the hospital.²⁹ The doctors determined that the cause of death was due to trauma to his brain.³⁰

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https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/officers-shot-at-inmate-during-transport-in-west-feliciana/article_516ea592-07c9-11ef-846f-07b15fb92365.html

¹⁹

<https://louisianavoice.com/2022/11/30/stabbing-death-the-latest-incident-to-mar-image-of-catahoula-corrections-center-with-history-of-administrative-problems/>

²⁰ *Brunet v. Warden Catahoula Corr. Ctr.*, No. 1:21-CV-01968, 2021 WL 5412293 (W.D. La. Sept. 23, 2021), report and recommendation adopted, No. 1:21-CV-01968-P, 2021 WL 5407836 (W.D. La. Nov. 18, 2021).

²¹

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/officers-shot-at-inmate-during-transport-in-west-feliciana/article_516ea592-07c9-11ef-846f-07b15fb92365.html

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ <https://www.knoe.com/2024/11/08/catahoula-authorities-searching-inmate-they-say-is-dangerous/>

²⁵

<https://www.lpsso.net/2018/11/16/incident-at-catahoula-jail-under-investigation-following-death-of-lafourche-inmate/>

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

One of the most appalling incidents happened in January of 2018 when two Catahoula Correctional officers were arrested due to a complaint for battery on an inmate.³¹ Officer Charles Ray LeBlanc was charged with second-degree battery and officer Ryan Shane Mayo was charged with assault and simple battery.³²

In 2021, there was a lawsuit that was filed called *Brunet v. Warden Catahoula Correctional Center*.³³ Ultimately the case was dismissed for Plaintiff's failure to state a claim.³⁴ The court held, "Brunet has not pleaded facts giving rise to a cognizable constitutional claim."³⁵ Brunet claimed that when he was transferred to Catahoula Correctional Center on October 5, 2020, due to a storm, he was confined for three to four days in a dorm with no running water, electricity, or proper ventilation.³⁶ He also claims that the conditions were so bad that one inmate was stabbed, one died from a heart attack, few inmates were punched, and some inmates were sharpening plexiglass that they broke off from a window just to get proper ventilation through the dorms.³⁷ Brunet stated that the guards shot pepper balls in the dorm which made it harder for them to breathe.³⁸ The court held that the pepper balls were reasonable because the guards were trying to restore discipline after one prisoner was stabbed multiple times, one was punched, and others were making shanks out of glass.³⁹

In 2020, the Office of Detention Oversight performed interviews with twelve detainees at Catahoula Correctional Center.⁴⁰ All twelve reportedly volunteered to give their opinions on the facility.⁴¹ To sum up the results of the interview, none made any allegations of discrimination, mistreatment, or abuse, ten out of twelve detainees complained about food services, three detainees stated they were only allowed recreation for one hour a day, six detainees complained that the facility did not provide soap for them to wash their hands, and five detainees complained about flies in the housing units.⁴²

As of May 17, 2024, an article came out blasting Sheriff Toney Edwards for his poor leadership.⁴³ It was reported that Sheriff Toney Edwards purchased Catahoula Correctional Center for twelve million dollars from LaSalle Corrections.⁴⁴ Since the purchase there have been many allegations including, twenty stabbings in one month, inmates were beaten by guards and

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<https://www.thetowntalk.com/story/news/2018/01/08/2-catahoula-officers-charged-after-inmate-battery/1015192001/>

³² *Id.*

³³ *Brunet v. Warden Catahoula Corr. Ctr.*, No. 1:21-CV-01968, 2021 WL 5412293 (W.D. La. Sept. 23, 2021), report and recommendation adopted, No. 1:21-CV-01968-P, 2021 WL 5407836 (W.D. La. Nov. 18, 2021).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/CatahoulaCCHarrisonburgLAJuly2020.pdf>

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³

<https://louisianavoice.com/2024/05/17/inmate-killings-and-beatings-questionable-expenditures-deputy-firings-seem-to-be-the-norm-for-catahoula-parish-s-o/>

⁴⁴ *Id.*

other inmates, and arrests were made of employees for smuggling contraband into the facility.⁴⁵ It has also been reported that the facility used inmate labor for construction projects for private citizens, their labor for personal non-profit projects, and to construct a storm shelter for Sheriff Toney Edwards and his family.⁴⁶

When preparing for my slide presentation, I made an effort to call Catahoula Correctional Center (318-744-2121)⁴⁷ one more time on November 18. I asked the lady if she could tell me how many inmates were in the jail, but she told me that she could not provide me with that information. From the start, it was very difficult to get any information about Catahoula Correctional Center. Their website did not have much information, their communication on the phone was poor, and they did not answer any of my emails.

Overall, it seems that there has been a history of bad dealings with Catahoula Correctional Center, but especially since Sheriff Toney Edwards and Warden Pat Book have taken over. Personally, I had a bad experience with them with regards to the public records request since they have still never answered the request, but it seems like Catahoula Correctional Center has been in the news over the last few years for all the wrong reasons. Unfortunately, it does not seem like anything is getting any better at Catahoula Correctional Center under the current leadership.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ <https://catahoulaso.com>