

MEMORANDUM

TO: Professors Erica Navalance and Nishi Kumar
FROM: Andru Okun
DATE: December 18, 2024
RE: “Better Know A Jail”: East Feliciana Parish Jail

East Feliciana Parish Jail

East Feliciana Parish is in southeast Louisiana, right above the city of Baton Rouge and below the state of Mississippi. The parish is roughly 450 acres and has an estimated population of 19,500.¹ Roughly 56% of the population is white and 41% is black. There are three towns within the parish: Clinton, Jackson, and Slaughter. Clinton—estimated population: 1,340²—is the parish seat and the location of the East Feliciana Parish Jail, which is overseen by the East Feliciana Parish Sheriff’s Office (EFPSO).

A. History of the East Feliciana Parish Jail

The current facility in which the East Feliciana Parish Jail is located opened in August, 1988.³ It was built at a cost of \$4 million following a federal court order condemning the old jail.⁴ While the replacement jail was originally designed to hold 95 prisoners, Sheriff Randy Maglone, the sheriff at the time of the facility’s opening, petitioned to allow for double bunking, increasing the capacity to 170 prisoners.⁵ Along with utilizing the new space to execute outstanding warrants, the EFPSO also used the jail to house Cuban detainees through an agreement with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), who paid the jail \$46 a day per INS detainee, subsidizing the jail’s operation.⁶ The jail would also come to house state prisoners and serve as an overflow location for prisoners of the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff’s Office.⁷

In 1997, the then-Clinton Police Chief Eddie Stewart filed a federal complaint against Sheriff Maglone.⁸ “The jail is a parish prison, period,” said Stewart. “The priority should be on locking up local people who need to be locked up. The parish jail belongs to the people, not the sheriff.”⁹ Maglone responded by asserting that holding state and federal prisoners helped with the cost of feeding, clothing, and guarding the parish prisoners.¹⁰

¹ United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2020 - East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, https://data.census.gov/profile/East_Feliciana_Parish,_Louisiana?g=050XX00US22037.

² United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2020 - Clinton, Louisiana, https://data.census.gov/profile/Clinton_town,_Louisiana?g=160XX00US2215990.

³ James Minton, *Prison in East Feliciana To Get Prisoners*, THE ADVOCATE, (Aug. 4, 1988).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Steve Wheeler, *EBR Jail Space Shortage Acute*, THE ADVOCATE, (Apr. 29, 1993).

⁸ James Minton, *East Feliciana Jail Practices Criticized*, THE ADVOCATE, (Feb. 8, 1997).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

The following year, six Cuban detainees sawed their way out of the jail and escaped.¹¹ As a Baton Rouge journalist reported at the time, “Foreign residents who commit crimes may be deported to their home country, but, because the United States has no repatriation agreement with Cuba, its citizens may be held in jail indefinitely.”¹² The East Feliciana Parish Jail continued to hold INS detainee’s until at least 2001.¹³

In 2000, Talmadge Bunch was elected sheriff of East Feliciana Parish, replacing Maglone.¹⁴ Aiming to increase the sheriff’s offices’ revenue without imposing additional taxes on parish residents, Bunch implemented a work-release program—also referred to as a transitional work program—that enabled his office to claim half of the wages prisoners earned while working at job sites outside of the jail, supplementing the per diem received by the EPFSO from the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DOC) for housing state prisoners.¹⁵ Paul Perkins, then the deputy sheriff for East Feliciana, stated in 2002 that the program generated \$600,000 a year for the sheriff’s office, more than double what the parish budget provided.¹⁶

In 2003, a prisoner serving a 12-year sentence in East Feliciana Parish Jail escaped.¹⁷ He was caught 15 years later while crossing a checkpoint in Mexico, at which point he was sent back to the East Feliciana Parish Jail.¹⁸

In 2012, two former employees of the East Feliciana Parish Jail detailed violations at the jail and its work release sites, including contraband being allowed inside the jail and work release prisoners consuming alcohol at a job site. Further allegations included jail staff bringing in their personal vehicles to be serviced by prisoners and the warden commandeering prisoners to help move furniture into his new house.¹⁹

¹¹ James Minton, *6 Cubans Flee E. Feliciana Prison*, THE ADVOCATE, (June 24, 1998); Notably, a Cuban INS detainee escaped in 1993 after reportedly being brought to a local hospital where he threw a chemical in a deputy sheriff’s face and jumped from a second-story window. Another East Feliciana Parish deputy responding to help search for the escapee was then involved in a car wreck that killed two people. The deputy who had been guarding the prisoner also suffered a heart attack, *see* James Minton, *Cuban Detainee Escapes; Deputy Wreck Kills 2*, THE ADVOCATE, (May 7, 1993).

¹² James Minton, *6 Cubans Flee E. Feliciana Prison*, THE ADVOCATE, (June 24, 1998).

¹³ Advocate Staff, *“Limbo in Louisiana – Plights of INS Detainees*, THE ADVOCATE, (Feb. 25, 2001); *see also* Antonio Matheus, *Cold War Flames on US Soil: The Oakdale Prison Riot*, JSTOR DAILY, <https://daily.jstor.org/cold-war-flames-on-us-soil-the-oakdale-prison-riot>.

¹⁴ James Minton, *Working Toward Release*, THE ADVOCATE, (Dec. 17, 2000).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Peter T. Kilborn, *Town With Odd Jobs Galore Turn to Inmates*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, (Mar. 27, 2002), <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/27/us/towns-with-odd-jobs-galore-turn-to-inmates.html>.

¹⁷ Advocate Staff, *After 15 Years, ‘Luck Ran Out’ As Escaped Louisiana Inmate Brought Back From Mexico*, (THE ADVOCATE, (Sep. 24, 2018), https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/after-15-years-luck-ran-out-as-escaped-louisiana-inmate-brought-back-from-mexico/article_6260acec-c067-11e8-aa7a-a338b294ec06.html.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Kiran Chawla, *I-Team: Loose Lockup*, WAFB, (Feb. 29, 2012), <https://www.wafb.com/story/17050402/i-team-loose-lockup>.

B. Present day operations at the East Feliciana Parish Jail

East Feliciana Parish Jail—including its transitional work program—currently has a capacity of 250.²⁰ As of December 18, 2024, the EFPSO listed 255 people in custody.²¹ Of those people, 18 are female and 237 are male; 109 are white and 146 are black.

In 2016, Jeff Travis, a former chief of operations for the DOC, replaced Sheriff Bunch, who served four-terms before being voted out.²² At the time Sheriff Travis was sworn in, the East Feliciana Parish Jail provided about 60% of the EFPSO's general fund revenue, mainly by housing state prisoners, some of whom generated additional funds through transitional work programs.²³ In 2017, a state prisoner housed at the East Feliciana Parish Jail walked off his work release site at a produce market in Zachary, Louisiana.²⁴ He then reportedly stabbed his girlfriend to death and died after jumping from a bridge into the Mississippi River.²⁵

In 2019, Sheriff Travis was reelected for a second term, earning 74% of the vote.²⁶ There have since been at least two separate instances of contraband being smuggled into the jail by EFPSO deputies.²⁷ The jail continues to house state prisoners and run a transitional work program, evinced by a report of a state prisoner briefly escaping while working on a parish road cleanup

²⁰ Rylee Kramer, *New Parole Laws Raising Concerns Over Current Overcrowded Prison Population*, WAFB, (Sep. 3, 2024),

<https://www.wafb.com/2024/09/04/new-parole-laws-raising-concerns-over-current-overcrowded-prison-population>.

²¹ East Feliciana Parish Sheriff's Office – Jail Roster, <http://www.eastfeliciana.lavns.org/roster.aspx>.

²² Advocate Staff, *Travis sworn in as East Feliciana Sheriff*, (Jul. 6, 2016),

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/east_feliciana/travis-sworn-in-as-east-feliciana-sheriff/article_ef43dc48-4174-11e6-a13d-e3ed35f2cc88.html.

²³ James Minton, *New Sheriff is Eager to Get Started*, (Jun. 22, 2016)

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/east_feliciana/new-sheriff-is-eager-to-get-started/article_aeab7127-fb6b-527b-8c7b-0b59f4029d78.html.

²⁴ WAFB Staff, *Body of Work Release Inmate Accused of Murdering Ex-girlfriend Recovered*, WAFB, (Sep. 20, 2017),

<https://www.wafb.com/story/36415187/body-of-work-release-inmate-accused-of-murdering-ex-girlfriend-recovered>.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Charles Lussier, *Jeff Travis Sails Into a Second Term as East Feliciana Sheriff*, THE ADVOCATE, (Oct. 12, 2019),

https://www.theadvocate.com/jeff-travis-sails-into-a-second-term-as-east-feliciana-sheriff/article_8b225434-eea4-11e9-8286-e31770cbcf58.html.

²⁷ WAFB Staff, *East Feliciana Corrections Officer Arrested After Trying to Bring Inmates Contraband*, WAFB, (Oct. 6, 2021),

<https://www.wafb.com/2021/10/06/east-feliciana-corrections-officer-arrested-after-trying-bring-inmates-contraband/>; Raley Pellitteri, *Sheriff's Office Fires, Arrest Deputy Accused of Sneaking Contraband into Prison*, WAFB, (Jan. 4, 2024),

<https://www.wafb.com/2024/01/04/sheriffs-office-fires-arrests-deputy-accused-sneaking-contraband-into-prison>.

crew in 2023.²⁸ Prisoners at the jail are also used to fill sandbags²⁹ and clean city vehicles.³⁰ Travis continues to serve as the sheriff of East Feliciana Parish today. The East Feliciana Parish Jail warden is Kenny Sanders³¹; the East Feliciana Parish Transitional Work Program warden is Cliff Hurst.³² The East Feliciana Parish Jail offers a HiSET Program to prisoners, allowing people to earn a high school equivalency credential while incarcerated.³³ The jail has also provided prisoners with parenting classes.³⁴

The East Feliciana Parish Jail reported one in-custody death between January 1, 2020 and the time of this writing. Jamie Wisham was arrested on July 16, 2022 by the Jackson Police Department and booked into the East Feliciana Parish Jail. According to an incident report from the EFPSO written on July 19, 2022, Wisham was found detoxing in his cell, lying in his feces and urine. Wisham was then given a shower by jail staff and transferred to Lane Regional Medical Center.³⁵ Wisham was pronounced dead upon arrival. A forensic examination report by the Jefferson Parish Forensic Center classified the death as natural, stating that Wisham died as a result of a Covid-19 infection.³⁶ He was 42 years old.

²⁸ Advocate Saff, *Inmate Makes Brief Escape from East Feliciana Parish Jail*, THE ADVOCATE, (Aug. 28, 2023), https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/inmate-makes-brief-escape-from-east-feliciana-parish-jail/article_36cb7100-45ed-11ee-b564-6307f8978983.html.

²⁹ See Jeff Travis – East Feliciana Sheriff Facebook post on September 10, 2024;

³⁰ Jordan Arceneaux, *Sheriff's Deputies Volunteering as Firefighters During Burn Ban*, UNFILTERED WITH KIRAN, (Sep. 1, 2023), <https://unfilteredwithkiran.com/sheriffs-deputies-volunteering-as-firefighters-during-burn-ban/>

³¹ East Feliciana Parish Sheriff's Office Website – “Meet Our Team” page, <https://www.efpso.org/leadership-team>

³² Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections, “East Feliciana Parish Transitional Work Program” page, <https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/east-feliciana-parish-transitional-work-program>.

³³ Frances Y. Spencer, *Prison Education Programs Offer New Paths Post Incarceration*, THE ADVOCATE, (Oct. 12, 2019), https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/east_feliciana/prison-education-programs-offer-new-paths-post-incarceration/article_22afbb10-6625-11ee-880f-c3f06a87dd66.html.

³⁴ Frances Y. Spencer, *Course Prepares East Feliciana Prisoners for Challenges, Joys of Fatherhood*, THE ADVOCATE, (Jun. 14, 2022), https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/east_feliciana/article_35e73942-e9d0-11ec-bd63-6b3f0572563f.html

³⁵ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Death-Records.pdf>

³⁶ *Id.*