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FROM: Mayowa Olatunde
RE: Facility Slide Memorandum
DATE: December 27, 2024

Caldwell Parish Correctional Center

Introduction

Caldwell Parish is one of sixty-four (64) parishes in Louisiana.¹ It was named after the prominent Caldwell family.² The population of Caldwell Parish in 2022 was approximately 9,554, making it the 59th most populated parish in Louisiana.³ The local jails in Caldwell Parish are the Caldwell Correctional Center and the LCS Caldwell Detention Center.⁴ Included also in the parish are the Caldwell Parish Work Release Facility and the Swanson Center for Youth at Columbia.⁵

Correctional Center Characteristics

The Caldwell Parish Correctional Center is a minimum-security facility at 671 Highway 845 Grayson, LA 71435. The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (LA DOC) operates and manages it. The Prison is run by the Caldwell Parish Sheriff's Office and by Warden Kevin Wyles.⁶

The correctional center is divided into two facilities.⁷ The facility's north side was built first in 1994 and houses approximately 400 inmates.⁸ The facility's south side was built second in

¹ LOUISIANA DESTINATIONS, <https://www.louisiana-destinations.com/louisiana-parishes.htm>.

² Local Louisiana, LOUISIANA.GOV, <https://www.louisiana.gov/local-louisiana/caldwell-parish>.

³ CALDWELL PARISH, <https://datacommons.org/place/geoId/22021>; INCARCERATION TRANSPARENCY, <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/la-prison-deaths/caldwell/>.

⁴ LA DPS&C, https://doc.louisiana.gov/location/caldwell_parish/.

⁵ INCARCERATION TRANSPARENCY, *supra* note 3.

⁶ <https://lsa.org/directory/caldwell-parish/>.

⁷ Telephone Interview with Kevin Wyles, Warden, Caldwell Parish Correctional Center (Nov. 19, 2024).

⁸ *Id.*

1996 and houses approximately 200 offenders, totaling a capacity of 600 offenders.⁹ 94% of the current population in the facility are males.¹⁰ During our phone interview, the warden mentioned that the highest female population in the facility had been 34 out of the 600 total capacity. Thus, the highest female population in the facilities since its inception has been 5.6%. I could not find any other demographic data or statistical data on the facility's population.

The Current Sheriff is Clay Bennett, who took office in 2016.¹¹ The facility mainly houses LA DOC pretrial offenders who have not yet been sentenced and are detained until their case is heard.¹² Thus, offenders arrested for misdemeanors or felonies in Caldwell Parish are typically processed at this facility.¹³ As a result, offenders sentenced to less than one year serve their time in the facility.¹⁴ In contrast, offenders with longer sentences are transferred to larger facilities in the Louisiana State Prison System or the Federal Bureau of Prisons.¹⁵

As of 2022, Clay Bennet made an annual salary of \$184,336, including insurance benefits worth \$18,646 and retirement benefits worth \$23,180.¹⁶ His total income for 2022 was \$226,297.¹⁷ I found his income interesting because the median household income in Caldwell Parish as of 2022 was \$21,667.¹⁸

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Knoe8News, Clay Bennett Sworn in as Caldwell Parish Sheriff,
<https://www.knoe.com/content/news/Clay-Bennett-sworn-in-as-Caldwell-Parish-Sheriff-385326091.html>.

¹² Jail Exchange, Caldwell Parish Correctional Center,
<https://www.jailexchange.com/city-and-county-jails/louisiana/caldwell-parish/caldwell-parish-correctional-center>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Caldwell Parish Sheriff Columbia Louisiana, Financial Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2020, 50,
[https://app.lla.la.gov/publicreports.nsf/0/88e3727d170817cf8625865c005d82a7/\\$file/000224d8.pdf](https://app.lla.la.gov/publicreports.nsf/0/88e3727d170817cf8625865c005d82a7/$file/000224d8.pdf).

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ QuickFacts Caldwell Parish, Louisiana, UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU,
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/caldwellparishlouisiana>.

Classes and Programming

The center offers a range of programs and classes, including a General Educational Development (GED) program, restorative justice courses, anger-management classes, substance abuse classes, and self-help classes.¹⁹ In addition, these classes allow the incarcerated individuals to continue their studies while incarcerated and earn a high school equivalency diploma.²⁰ The Caldwell Sheriff's office recognized four GED program graduates at the correctional center last year, and a news article was published about it.²¹

Public Records Request and Inmate Mortality

The correctional center has no contact information for the Warden or an email to send a records request. Thus, I submitted my records request to Jenny Fuller, the contact on the log sheet from last year. It took a while to hear back from her, and after multiple attempts to contact her, she got back to me on October 10, 2024, requesting me to send her another attachment of the records request. This second attempt to request the death records yielded no fruit because she went ghost and did not respond to my multiple follow-up attempts until November 12, 2024. Her response in November was to inform me that there was one pre-trial inmate who passed away on November 15, 2023, from natural causes.

I tried multiple times to get more information from her regarding the death, but she stated that the warden had the information, and she could not get it. Thus, I was forced to call the facility on November 19, 2024, and asked to speak with the Warden. During this phone call, I obtained a lot of the information included in this memo. However, during the phone call, the Warden opined that there were “zero (0) deaths in 2024, one (1) in 2023, zero (0) in 2022, and

¹⁹ LEVEL, <https://learnlevel.org/prison-units/caldwell-correctional-center-louisiana/>; Telephone Interview with Kevin Wyles, Warden, Caldwell Parish Correctional Center (Nov. 19, 2024).

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Aysha Decuir, *Caldwell Parish Sheriff's Office recognizes four GED program graduates at the Caldwell Correctional Center*, MYARKLAMISS.COM, <https://www.myarklamiss.com/news/local-news/caldwell-parish-sheriffs-office-recognizes-four-ged-program-graduates-at-the-caldwell-correctional-center/>.

one (1) in 2021.”²² Both of the deaths were natural causes.²³ However, I was able to find on the Incarceration Transparency website that there had been two (2) reported deaths since 2020.²⁴

The warden asked me to submit another death records request to him. I mistakenly sent him the work records request that was saved on my computer. The warden did send work records on December 2, 2024. However, after realizing my mistake, I sent him the death records request that day. I tried following up via the phone, but he never responded to me after that.

Overall, it was very challenging to find information about the correctional center. There is very little news coverage about the prison's statistics, demographics, or history. I was forced to rely on the phone interview with Warden Wyles. Getting a response or even responsive documents about my record request was also challenging. The prison's transparency level is low and needs to improve. Even though the facility does not house more than 600 offenders, it's still big enough to require more transparency.

News Coverage

In 2024, a Man brought suit, accusing Sherrieff Clay Bennet and five (5) deputies of violating his civil rights when they arrested him in January of 2022.²⁵ He accused them of using unreasonable and unnecessary force during the arrest.²⁶ There was also a report in 2023 that Matthew Brown, an Inmate at the facility, escaped.²⁷ He was later arrested and returned to the facility.²⁸

²² Telephone Interview with Kevin Wyles, Warden, Caldwell Parish Correctional Center (Nov. 19, 2024).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ INCARCERATION TRANSPARENCY, <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/la-prison-deaths/caldwell/>, last visited December 29, 2024.

²⁵ Knoe8News, Man accuses Caldwell Parish Sheriff's Office of violating civil rights, <https://www.knoe.com/2024/09/30/man-accuses-columbia-parish-sheriffs-office-violating-civil-rights/>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷

<https://www.wncn.com/article/news/crime/deputies-capture-escaped-nc-prison-inmate/275-fdc783d4-1830-4268-ad76-026915497c25>.

²⁸ *Id.*

Lastly, I found an article where Caldwell Parish Inmates complained about excessive sickening heat and the facility not using air conditioning.²⁹ The YouTube video outlined the excessive winter heat and the lack of compassion to address the issue³⁰. The inmates were thus seeking relief and help from the public with the excessive conditions.³¹

It is important to note that I did not find any news coverage about the reported deaths in the facility since 2020. It's even more shocking when the Incarceration Transparency has two deaths listed since 2020. It goes to show that more transparency is needed in the prison. Without more transparency, likely, more death incidents or other related violent incidents and civil rights violations will likely be swept under the rug, and the inmates will have little to no recourse to seek relief. Thus, a lawsuit to uncover the death records and the details of the deaths may be warranted in this facility.

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRo8azs9O0A>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*