

**TO:** Professors Erica Navalance and Nishi Kumar  
**FROM:** Dymon White  
**RE:** Assignment #3: Ouachita Parish Transitional Work Program Memo  
**DATE:** December 29, 2024

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**Ouachita Parish Transitional Work Program**

**Introduction and Program Characteristics**

The Ouachita Parish Transitional Work Program (herein OPTWP) is located at 4801 S. Grand St. Monroe, Louisiana 71202.<sup>1</sup> As the name states it is located in Ouachita Parish which is located in Northeast Louisiana with a population of about 160,000 people.<sup>2</sup> The OPTWP formerly known as “Work Release” began in 1956, and by the mid 1970s the Ouachita Parish County government started an initiative that provided training programs for inmates at Ouachita Parish County jails.<sup>3</sup> The OPTWP houses up to 2,366 incarcerated individuals who are sent out to various work sites.<sup>4</sup> The OPTWP is available to incarcerated men and women; in order to qualify for the program the incarcerated individuals must be on violent offenders and have an acceptable disciplinary record according to Ouachita Parish.<sup>5</sup> The OPTWP facility is operated by the Ouachita Parish Sheriff Department at the direction of the Louisiana DOC.<sup>6</sup>

The current Sherriff of Ouachita Parish is Marc Mashaw who was recently elected in 2023 and sworn in on July 2024, where he is serving a four year term.<sup>7</sup> Sheriff Mashaw received an endorsement form the previous Sheriff, Jay Russell who retired after thirty nine years in law enforcement, eleven of those he served as sheriff.<sup>8</sup> Sheriff Marc Mashaw began his career in law enforcement as a reserve deputy with the Ouachita Parish Sheriff’s Office in 1987.<sup>9</sup> In the following years, Sheriff Mashaw then rose up the ranks through the years being sworn in as a full time deputy in 1989, and later serving as a patrol deputy, training officer, and the Metro Narcotics Unit.<sup>10</sup> In 2008 Sheriff Mashaw was promoted to Captain of Communications and Computer Services Divisions, in 2012 he was promoted by former Sheriff Jay Russell to Chief Deputy in 2012.<sup>11</sup> Notably, Sheriff Marc Mashaw is also a graduate of the 231st F.B.I. National Academy in Quantico, VA.<sup>12</sup>

**Number of Deaths and Trends**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opso.net/transitional-work-program>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ouachitaparishlouisiana/PST045223>

<sup>3</sup> <https://fayettesheriffww.net/louisiana/county-jail/ouachita-parish-work-release-facility/>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.opso.net/transitional-work-program>

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.opso.net/administration>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.knoe.com/2023/10/16/ouachita-parish-chief-deputy-marc-mashaw-becomes-opso-sheriff-elect/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.opso.net/administration>

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

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

I was unable to receive an updated number of deaths, if any at the OPTWP, but from previous records it was reported that there were 0 deaths in the OPTWP in 2021 and 2022.<sup>13</sup>

### **Finances and Work Information**

The OPTWP allows qualified incarcerated individuals to work and earn money.<sup>14</sup> The incarcerated individuals in the program can use the money they earn to pay for their incarceration, court appointed child support, family support, or their restitution fees.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Ouachita Parish provides the incarcerated individuals with transportation to and from their jobs.<sup>16</sup> However, the OPTWP does not only benefit incarcerated individuals. Within the OPTWP there is a program called the Fidelity Bond Program.<sup>17</sup> This program provides employers with insurance to protect against employee dishonesty, through this program employers receive a \$5,000 free and no deductible Fidelity Bond.<sup>18</sup> There is another program for employers called the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, where an employer can get tax benefits.<sup>19</sup> For an employer to qualify they must work the incarcerated individual for more than 400 hours a year.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, according to Ouachita Parish approximately ten to twenty percent of individuals end up continuing working for their employer after their release.<sup>21</sup> Not only must incarcerated individuals qualify to get into the OPTWP there are also rules to remain in the program. OPTWP has a zero-tolerance policy for drug and alcohol use within the program.<sup>22</sup>

Incarcerated participants are drug and alcohol tested daily and are also subjected to monthly random testing.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Ouachita Parish notes that if an employer is experiencing problems with an incarcerated employee such as “loafing” (walking around not working), displaying abnormal behavior, or not having the skill set required for the job then the employee may be replaced.<sup>24</sup> There is not much information on the demographics of the program because the individuals in the program were previously housed at the Ouachita Parish Correctional Center, but now has moved to a separate facility. The OPTWP has some transparency issues regarding information like this which will be discussed in the transparency section. However, in 2021, it was reported that about 41.49% of incarcerated individuals in the program are White and 56.46% are African American.<sup>25</sup> While there is budget information regarding the Ouachita Parish Correctional Center not much information is available for the

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Ouachita-Parish-Correctional-Center-PRR-Response-2021-22.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.opso.net/transitional-work-program>

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.opso.net/divisions/work-release/>

amount of money allocated to the OPTWP. However, Ouachita Parish boasts about the success of the OPTWP.

### **Evidence of Oversight and Transparency**

The Oversight of the OPTWP is run by the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice (LCLE). The LCLE releases reports on different correctional facilities and work programs throughout the state. However, there is not much or any information on the site about the OPTWP. Due to the success of the OPTWP it was accredited by the ACA in 2021.<sup>26</sup> The ACA is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the criminal justice system.<sup>27</sup> There has been no update since 2021 on if the OPTWP is still currently accredited by the ACA. As for audits, the Louisiana Legislative Auditor conducts audits of parishes across the state.<sup>28</sup> However, there are no audits for the OPTWP, but there are audits of the Sheriff's Department, but the audit does not mention any information about the OPTWP.<sup>29</sup> Overall, OPTWP has issues in regard to transparency. On their website the only information regarding the OPTWP focuses on employer benefits for hiring incarcerated individuals, or general talks of the success of the program. As far as actual information regarding the incarcerated individuals such as demographics and what facilities they work at, that information is lacking.

I struggled in receiving any death records and when I would call, I would often be redirected to another person, and that person would tell me I need to talk to the previous person. My initial point of contact was Mr. Glenn Springfield, but he quickly notified me that he was no longer employed at OPTWP and pointed me to Ms. Dayna Saponara who informed me she would send my request to the Sheriff. I followed up with the Sheriff by email but never received a response. I called the parish building as well but was unsuccessful in that area as well.

### **Notable Cases and Complaints**

One of the most notable controversies regarding the OPTWP comes from an account covered in an article from The Appeal, from a family member of an incarcerated individual employed in the OPTWP. The Appeal is a non-profit news organization that exposes the harms of the criminal legal system and envisions a world in which systems of support and care, not punishment, create public safety.<sup>30</sup> This account takes place in May 2020, during the peak of the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> Kia Jones is the sister of an incarcerated employee in the OPTWP who worked at DG Foods poultry plant in Bastrop, Louisiana located in Morehouse Parish.<sup>32</sup> Ms. Jones's brother requested to be anonymous out of fear of retaliation from the prison guards.<sup>33</sup> In early May Ms. Jones's brother sent her a video which showed workers using a dirty bathroom with water on the

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.aca.org>

<sup>27</sup> Id.

<sup>28</sup>

[https://app2.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/72d7434d0b56950386258bf7006127a1/\\$file/00006793.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app2.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/72d7434d0b56950386258bf7006127a1/$file/00006793.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

<sup>29</sup> Id.

<sup>30</sup> <https://theappeal.org/about-us/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://theappeal.org/louisiana-poultry-plant-prison-labor/>

<sup>32</sup> Id.

<sup>33</sup> Id.

floor, no soap, or toilet seats.<sup>34</sup> During the pandemic most visitation for prisons and jails had been halted state wide but Ouachita Parish did not shut down the OPTWP.<sup>35</sup> Ms. Jones's brother reported working 8 eight hours a day cutting up chickens and notes that if her brother or any other incarcerated people complain they could be sent back to jail and lose their good time credit.<sup>36</sup> Ms. Jones's brother reports that some days they get masks for work and other days they don't, she had to get him his own masks just so he could feel safe at work.<sup>37</sup> In response to the controversy, Glenn Springfield who was my original point of contact for the PRR requests (who is noted to be a Ouachita Parish sheriff's office spokesperson) said to limit the virus' spread workers sent to DG Foods were given hand sanitizer before meals and after work shifts.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, he said the buses were sanitized daily and masks were provided. However, due to Ms. Jones's information from her brother she did not believe the Sheriff's office was truthful or doing enough to protect her brother.<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion, I believe there is good reason to further investigate the OPTWP.

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<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*