MEMORANDUM

TO: Professors Armstrong and Pourciau
FROM: Fatima Fernandes
DATE: Monday, April 20, 2026
RE: Better Know a Jail - Swanson Center for Youth at Columbia in Caldwell Parish

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Swanson Center for Youth at Columbia in Caldwell Parish

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I. Introduction

Caldwell Parish is located in rural Northeast Louisiana. It has a population of approximately 9,500 people. In 2024, the median household income was a little over $47,000 with the median property value at $93,300. In 2025, 18.4% of Caldwell residents had severe housing problems and 29.8% of the population live below the poverty line. Women between the ages of 25-34 years old report the largest demographic in severe poverty.

The median age in Caldwell Parish is 40.4 years old. Only about 3,378 people were employed in 2024. The most common occupations are construction and extraction (347), material moving (317), and installation, maintenance and repair occupations (240). Over ninety-nine percent of its population are United States citizens and about 0.821% of its residents were born outside the country. There is a majority (7,150) white population, with Black population (1,840) and multi-racial populations (273) following suit. Caldwell Parish has a large military veteran presence from those who served in the Gulf War, Vietnam, and Korea. Politically, about 60.2% voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 Presidential Election. Caldwell Parish, like all of the state of Louisiana, is represented by Senators Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy. In 2022, the amount of reported violent crimes was 221 per 100,000 residents. In 2025, the number of deaths from firearms was 36.9 per 100,000 residents.

II. Characteristics

Swanson Center for Youth at Columbia (SCYC) is a secure center for incarcerated male youth in Columbia, LA. SCYC was formerly a center for residents with developmental disabilities and, as of 2013, it now houses incarcerated children. Per the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), the new Center provides a therapeutic, secure setting where youth receive treatment services and rehabilitation. SCYC's on-site, state-approved Pinehill Alternative School, provides educational opportunities for resident youth, including academic instruction and life skills training. Daily therapeutic group sessions address identified needs, such as anger management and substance abuse.

SCYC is separate from Swanson Center for Youth at Monroe (SCYM). However, they are sixteen minutes apart. SCYC does not use room confinement or isolation, unlike SCYM. SCYC has the capacity of 48 beds for incarcerated people, costing $317.78 per day per bed as of 2018. SCYC is located at 132 Hwy 850 Columbia, LA 71418. SCYC does not appear to have its own website, but OJJ does provide a brief overview of the SCYC facility's services and programs, staff contact, and telephone, fax, and visitation hours.

SCYC offices varied services, per the OJJ website, this includes anger management; victim awareness program; substance abuse treatment; healthy masculinity; pre-release preparation; parenting; juvenile understanding and managing problematic behavior program (JUMP) sexual treatment units; FAST track; mental health treatment unit; and a transitional mental health unit.

Zero deaths occurred at the facility from 2020-2024.

Visitation is available on the weekends from 12pm – 4pm by appointment only. Visitors must adhere to visitor rules and guidelines. Approved visitors may include a spouse, parent, guardian, siblings, biological children, or any member of the immediate family. All visitors must submit to a criminal background check, show photo identification, and provide basic information to the facility to ensure safety during the visitation. Lastly, visitors must leave all their belongings in their cars and be appropriate dressed.

SCYC is under the supervision of the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) and not under the current Caldwell Parish sheriff, Clay Bennett. The OJJ website does, however, list Rodney Ward as the staff Youth Facilities Director. OJJ is under the jurisdiction of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. It oversees the youth who have been assigned to a secure care facility. The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) license the juvenile detention facilities in the state and mandates standards.

It was a bit confusing to interpret the executive budget I found for Louisiana's FY 2026-2027. The existing operating budget as of December 2025 was over $198.6 million including state direct funds, interagency transfers, fees and self-generated funds, statutory dedications, and federal funds. The proposed 2026-2027 budget is for over $226.5 million including the same above listed means of financing. Based on the Louisiana Senate Finance Committee fiscal year 2023 executive budget, the breakdown of the expenditures for youth services, from most to least expensive, is as follows: personal services (salaries, other, and related benefits); other charges (debt service, interagency transfer); and operating expenses (travel, operating services, supplies).

III. Evidence of Oversight

There appears to be no accreditation by national associations American Correctional Association (ACA), National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC), or Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

SCYC is under the state's secure care system which aims for accreditation. They claim to be following the nationally acclaimed Louisiana model of therapeutic secure care Focused on rehabilitation and treatment, and location includes state-approved Pinehill alternative school (high school).

There were several audits with their respective results for SCYC, but these were not readily accessible on the OJJ website under the SCYC section. I was able to download the results based on my google search for the Louisiana Legislative Auditor (LLA) which conducted an oversight of safety in secure care

facilities in 2018. Here, LLA found there were staffing shortages and it was a recurring issue. Therefore, these facilities aren't always compliant with staffing ratios required by the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). There was also a general increase in violence and drug usage. I was unable to find a more recent audit. I was able to find a PREA 2023 result which concluded there were no incidents of sexual abuse in the facility. However, there has not been an updated audit, at least made available to the public at this time. Finally, I was unable to find a report or audit from Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC), the Department of Justice (DOJ), or the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement (LCLE).

In the past five years, there was only one lawsuit brought against SCYC, and all other secure care facilities operated by OJJ in the Middle District of Louisiana, including Acadiana Center for Youth in Bunkie; Bridge City Center for Youth; Swanson-Columbia and Swanson-Monroe. On May 14, 2020, suit was filed under the habeas corpus statute, 22 U.S.C. § 2241, and the civil rights violations by government officials, 42 U.S.C. § 1983. They sought declaratory and injunctive relief related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the facilities' failures to implement appropriate measures to ensure the children's safety, therein, placing them in a significant risk of serious harm. For all the children tested for COVID-19, 97% tested positive for the disease. After the plaintiffs failed to meet evidentiary requirements, the parties reached a private settlement.

IV. Evidence of Transparency

When OJJ will have a public meeting, they will give notice and a brief outline of topics to be discussed. These are posted on the OJJ website calendar. Public briefings on jail operations by officials can be found, after some sleuthing, under the State of Louisiana Division of Administration, Boards and Commissions website. These boards appear to meet annually at a minimum.

There is no direct inmate locator or search under the OJJ SCYC page. However, it appears that anyone detained in Caldwell Parish can be located through the Parish Sheriff's office website. Alternatively, incarcerated people may possibly be located via a third-party website.There are not any reports or research by

advocacy groups on SCYC but there are few for SCYM. I wasn't assigned this facility to file public records requests, so I am unsure how helpful they are with public related inquiries.