

To: Professor Armstrong
From: Ava Myers
Re: Better Know a Jail: Tensas Parish Detention Center
Date: April 20, 2026

BETTER KNOW A JAIL - TENSAS PARISH DETENTION CENTER DEATHS SINCE 2015

Since 2015, there have been a total of 5 identifiable deaths at Tensas Parish Detention Center (TPDC). One occurred in 2015, the decedent's name was Robert Penton and occurred on July 11, 2015.¹ The death was described as a medical death, and an autopsy was conducted, however no other relevant information as to the specific cause of death was provided. Mr. Penton had been incarcerated at TPDC for about 5 months before he passed. In 2022 there were three reported deaths, two of which were medical and one of which was suicide by hanging. Mr. Demarcus Magee passed away on January 7, 2022, after being incarcerated for approximately 12 years, and the manner of death was described as “vascular- any type of bleed to include GI, strokes, brain,” and no autopsy was required.² A separate death report received by a previous student which did not list decedent's name but reported a death in January of 2022 (thus we can assume this decedent was likely Mr. Magee) specified that the decedent had COVID when he passed.³ Also in 2022, Mr. John Herbert III passed away on November 2, 2022, after being incarcerated for approximately 5 years, and the manner of death was described as suicide.⁴ A separate death report received by a previous student specified that Mr. Herbert committed suicide by hanging.⁵ Also in 2022, Mr. Calvin Blakes passed away on April 23, 2022, after being incarcerated for approximately 16 years, and the manner of death was described as “respiratory,” which would be classified as a medical death.⁶ In 2023, one death was reported, which was the death of Mr. Phillip Gomez. Mr. Gomez passed away on May 9, 2023, after being incarcerated for approximately 6 years, and the manner of his death was described as suicide.⁷ A separate death report received by a previous student specified that Mr. Gomez committed suicide by hanging.⁸ On September 9, 2025, an individual named Mr. Jenkins passed away due to hypertensive atherosclerosis CVD, however records are inconsistent on whether his first name is James or Joseph.⁹

¹ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Penton-Robert-Tensas-2015-DOC-CJ9.pdf>

² <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Magee-Demarcus-Tensas-2022.pdf>

³ <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Is6JZU3z5l8S5LeF1Fx9ssQxrffeWnPH>, Pg. 3.

⁴ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Hebert-III-John-Tensas-2022-1.pdf>

⁵ <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Is6JZU3z5l8S5LeF1Fx9ssQxrffeWnPH>, Pg. 6.

⁶ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Blakes-Calvin-Tensas-2022.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Gomez-Philip-Tensas-2023.pdf>

⁸ <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Is6JZU3z5l8S5LeF1Fx9ssQxrffeWnPH>, Pg. 9.

⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qZMpjQFQURf3pI1GD1s5gjTTRaRN3m-V/view?usp=drive_link (James),
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y79BVM380tX-F3CnETrJjf4DF-hv5WP-/view?usp=drive_link (Joseph)

As we can see, there have been 3 medical deaths reported and 2 suicides reported. Both the medical related deaths and suicides imply that prisoner's medical care (both physical care and mental care) are not being properly taken care of.

JAIL CHARACTERISTICS

Tensas Parish Detention Center is located at 8606 Highway 65 in Waterproof, Louisiana, and was built in 1985 with an initial capacity of 78.¹⁰ However, there are reports claiming that TPDC was not open until 2000, so the definitive date remains unknown.¹¹ The most recent audit, which will be discussed in more detail later, occurred in 2022 and reports that the facility's capacity has now expanded to 600, and housed 428 prisoners on the day the audit was conducted.¹² TPDC has historically been an Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) facility, which means that they house detainees on behalf of ICE, in addition to their non-ICE detainees.¹³ Robert L. Rushing is the current sheriff of Tensas Parish, and he assumed office in 2024.¹⁴ The current warden of TPDC is Nolan Bass, who served as assistant warden before filling the role of warden.¹⁵ Despite not being listed on the Tensas Parish administrative directory, the current assistant warden is likely Antonio Johnson, as he is listed as the assistant warden on reports and in recent court filings.¹⁶

As of 2021, TPDC has a pretrial detention rate of 189.1 per 10,000 residents, which is significantly higher than the overall state of Louisiana's pretrial detention rate of 29.4 per 10,000 residents and even more drastic of a discrepancy from the United State's pretrial detention rate, which is 12.4 per 10,000 residents.¹⁷ Numbers from 2018 explain that 75% of Louisiana's arrests are Part II arrests, which are defined as "less serious offenses" such as drug violations and disorderly conduct.¹⁸ In Tensas Parish specifically, 80% of total arrests are Part II arrests.¹⁹ The national average of prisoners held pretrial is 5, and in 2019 there were an average of 91 prisoners held pretrial, and 79 in 2021.²⁰

EVIDENCE OF OVERSIGHT AND TRANSPARENCY

The most recent report details the Tensas Parish Sheriff's Department budget for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2025.²¹ This financial audit reports a \$4,630,813 final budget fund

¹⁰<https://lailluminator.com/2023/04/07/as-critics-note-problems-of-mass-incarceration-local-jails-add-more-beds/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20the%20Tensas%20Parish,under%20a%20Creative%20Commons%20license.>

¹¹ https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/2012tensas-parish-detntn_cntr_waterproof-LA-jul10-12-2012.pdf, pg. 3

¹² <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2022.08.01-Tensas-Parish-BJG-Audit.pdf>

¹³ <https://documentedny.com/intergovernmental-service-agreements-contract-detention-center/>

¹⁴ <https://lsa.org/directory/tensas-parish/>

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Tensas-Parish-Detention-Center-Philip-Gomez.pdf>, *Elder v. Bass*, No. 24-30653, 2025 U.S. App. LEXIS 19717 (5th Cir. Aug. 5, 2025)

¹⁷ <https://www.vera.org/louisiana-locked-up/parish/Tensas>

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ [https://app.la.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/F20DF6264EA81FB286258D7E00745885/\\$FILE/00009897.pdf](https://app.la.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/F20DF6264EA81FB286258D7E00745885/$FILE/00009897.pdf)

balance at the end of the year.²² This audit also reports detention center revenues to be \$5,319,747, which is an increase from the approximate \$3,700,000 in revenues from 2021.²³

Many reports have been issued and audits conducted on TPDC, the earliest found being in 2006 and the most recent being from 2022. The reports will be discussed chronologically. In 2006, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a filled out version of the Condition of Confinement Worksheet, which is a worksheet required for IGSA facilities used over 72 hours.²⁴ This worksheet requires a reviewer to review the facility regarding legal access standards, detainee services, health services, and security and control, and rate whether they are acceptable, deficient, or at risk.²⁵ The facility was identified as “acceptable” on all accounts, and no recommendations were given.²⁶

In 2012, DHS conducted a 2 day inspection of TPDC and the Office of Detention Oversight (ODO) issued a Compliance Inspection (CI) report of the ICE National Detention Standards (NDS).²⁷ This report noted that in 2009, ODO’s predecessor, Detention Facilities Inspection Group (DFIG), conducted a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) of TPDC, which was unable to be found. This report notes that in the QAR, only 7 of the 25 standards reviewed were in full compliance, while the remaining 18 standards accounted for 60 deficiencies.²⁸ This report notes that the QAR took place only weeks after a TPDC prisoner passed on February 7, 2009, after spending several days in the hospital due to diabetes complications, and that DFIG investigated this death and found issues with translation in the TODC medical unit and recordkeeping.²⁹ The only other identifiable report of this death comes from a list of deaths in ICE custody published on ICE’s website, which does not bode well for TPDC’s transparency.³⁰ This report also noted a NDS review done by the Office of Removal Operations’ (ERO) contractor a few months prior in March of 2012 in which TPDC received an overall rating of “acceptable” and was found compliant with all 37 standards that were reviewed.³¹ However, in this report conducted by the ODO which reviewed 16 NDS, only 8 standards were determined to be fully compliant, and 14 deficiencies were found in the remaining 8 standards as follows: 3 deficiencies in access to legal material, 1 in detainee grievance procedures, 5 in environmental health and safety, 1 in food service, 1 in medical care, 1 in staff-detainee communication, and 1 in suicide prevential and intervention.³² The report notes that many deficiencies were administrative, but a few stuck out as having the ability to severely impact prisoners directly, one of which being access to legal materials. The report explains that TPDC maintains a law library

²² *Id.*, pg. 50.

²³ *Id.*, pg. 18, <https://veritenews.org/2023/04/06/local-jails-add-more-beds/>

²⁴ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/dfra-ice-dro/tensasparishdetentioncenterwaterproofla88102006.pdf>

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*, summary on pg. 81.

²⁷ https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/2012tensas-parish-detntn_cntr_waterproof-LA-jul10-12-2012.pdf

²⁸ *Id.*, pg. 3.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/reports/detaineedeaths2003-present.pdf>

³¹ https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/odo-compliance-inspections/2012tensas-parish-detntn_cntr_waterproof-LA-jul10-12-2012.pdf, pg.

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³² *Id.*

which each prisoner can access for 5 hours a week, however, there was no policy in place to assist illiterate and non-english speaking prisoners when using the library and/or drafting legal documents.³³ This is especially concerning because this facility houses ICE prisoners and thus the possibility of a non-English speaking prisoner having no guidance in their native language is rather high. Another deficiency that stuck out was the unseemly upkeep of prisoner bathrooms.³⁴

In 2016, a memo discussing the outcome of an investigation by DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) into conditions of ICE detainees at TPDC was produced.³⁵ The memo discussed 3 complaints that spanned from 2011-2014, all of which were ultimately closed due to the fact that ICE informed CRCL that they were no longer using TPDC to house ICE prisoners.³⁶ The complaints, despite being dismissed, still shed some light on what goes on in TPDC. One complaint that CRCL received from the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC) stated several things: A prisoner reported a concerning use of force in the facility, multiple prisoners reported inadequate medical care, prisoners were given contaminated water to drink and were not notified until days later, and a prisoner was not given adequate medical care when they claimed to feel weak and subsequently faint.³⁷ The second complaint alleged that prisoners went on a hunger strike to protest substandard conditions regarding recreation, law library access, legal counsel access, medical care, food, abusive staff, and unsanitary conditions.³⁸ The third complaint was from an ICE prisoner at TPDC who alleged that he was not provided with razors, toilet paper, or soap for three weeks.³⁹

In 2022, TPDC was audited to receive a recertification in compliance with the “Basic Jail Guidelines,”(BJG) of which resulted in the facility being recertified.⁴⁰ BJC certification requires compliance in several areas, including but not limited to emergency preparedness/response, security, order, care, and offender programs and activity. One thing that was noted in this report is that TPDC is required to be Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) compliant due to contract language and that at the time of the audit, they were not.⁴¹ The auditor noted that TPDC would get in contact with DPS&C to see when the next available PREA class would be offered so that they could comply, however, TPDC still does not seem to be PREA compliant as per the PREA audit directory.⁴²

NOTABLE CASES/COMPLAINTS

There are multiple cases and complaints worth discussing relating to TPDC. One recent case, *Elder v. Bass*, was partially remanded by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals only 6 months

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*, pg. 5.

³⁵ https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/tensas-parish-detention-center_09-12-16.pdf

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*, pg.1-2.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2022.08.01-Tensas-Parish-BJG-Audit.pdf>

⁴¹ *Id.*, pg. 6.

⁴² https://www.prearesourcecenter.org/audit/directory?a=tensas+parish+detention+center&b=&c=All&d=All&e=&f=&sort_by=field_audit_start_date_value_2

ago in August of 2025.⁴³ In this case, Glen Elder alleged that TPDC's water was shut off on multiple occasions for days or weeks at a time between September 2023 and July 2024. During these waterless periods, prisoners were forced to defecate into plastic bags and deposit them into larger bags which contained the feces of approximately 80 other prisoners. Mr. Elder also alleged extreme filth, claiming there was human waste on the floors, in showers, and smeared on walls. Additionally, Mr. Elder alleged that TPDC failed to provide adequate bottled water for cleaning and drinking. Mr. Elder alleged that he complained on multiple occasions to Warden Bass and Assistant Warden Johnson, who did nothing and were even allegedly involved in burning the feces-filled bags and pumping raw sewage outside. The appellate court held that the district court erred in dismissing Mr. Elder's eighth amendment claims as frivolous for failure to state a claim because he sufficiently alleged that the unsanitary conditions were objectively serious enough to violate the eighth amendment, and that Mr. Elder plausibly alleged that Bass and Johnson acted with deliberate indifference to this health and safety. Thus the appellate court vacated and remanded the case for further proceedings regarding the claims against Bass and Johnson.

There have also been complaints from TPDC employees regarding poor working conditions.⁴⁴ Back in 2020, employees threatened to strike, claiming TPDC continuously failed to comply with COVID restrictions leading to uncontrolled outbreaks, poor sanitary conditions throughout the facility, lack of mandatory meal breaks, lack of air conditioning, understaffing, and disciplinary actions against employees that appear to be racially motivated. Employees spoke to then-warden Smith who dismissed their claims, claiming "I am the boss, and I make the decisions. This is my jail." which caused the impacted employees to reach out to then-sheriff Jones.

Additionally, there have been instances of excessive force. In 2017, three TPDC guards were arrested after assaulting a handcuffed prisoner.⁴⁵ All three guards were arrested and faced charges.

⁴³ *Elder v. Bass*, No. 24-30653, 2025 U.S. App. LEXIS 19717 (5th Cir. Aug. 5, 2025)

⁴⁴<https://www.knoe.com/video/2020/08/15/tensas-parish-detention-center-workers-threaten-strike-over-poor-working-conditions/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.knoe.com/content/news/Three-Tensas-Parish-Detention-guards-arrested-after--413758003.html>