**TO:** Professors Andrea Armstrong and Samantha Pourciau

**FROM:** Abigail Karas

**RE:** "Better Know a Jail" Memo

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**Madison Parish Jail**

## Introduction and History

Madison Parish is one of the most incarcerated parishes in Louisiana.[1] Madison Parish Jail is a small local jail in the larger parish network.

Madison Parish was created in 1838, and at that time the parish seat and courthouse were located in Richmond, Louisiana in Madison Parish. That courthouse was destroyed in 1863 doing the Civil War. A new courthouse was then built in Tallulah, Louisiana in 1887 and moved again one more time before returning to the previously built Tallulah building in the 1930s where it has functioned since.[2] The Madison Parish Jail is part of the Madison Parish Sheriff's Office (MPSO), which is located in the parish courthouse.[3] The MPSO was established in 1838 with the first sheriff being Charles J. Gay.[4] The Madison Parish Jail, which the sheriff operates, likely has existed in some form since then.

When the Madison Parish Jail was established, Madison Parish was largely plantations and rural land. It is estimated that there were seventy-five plantations in Madison Parish alone.[5] In essence, enslaved black people built Madison Parish.

According to an article published in 1855 in a newspaper that later became The Advocate, an enslaved man in Madison Parish ran away from the plantation that enslaved him.[6] The article does not give the man's name, so I'll refer to him as C. C was then incarcerated at Madison Parish Jail for being a runaway slave.[7] The Sheriff running the Madison Parish Jail at this time would have ben James L. Crandell, who was elected in 1852, 3 years prior to this incident.[8] Reportedly, C "resisted his master," Drury Boykin, when Boykin came to collect him from the

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[1] Bobbi-Jeanne Misick, *Data Shows Louisiana Still Leads Nation for State Prisoners Held in Local Jails*, Verite News, January 23, 2026

[2] John Deacon, *American Courthouses: Madison Parish*

[3] Madison Parish Jail Information. Accessed on madisonparishjailla.org

[4] *Crimes in Madison Parish*, Madison Journal, Centennial Edition, August 14, 1975. Accessed on https://www.lagenweb.org/madison/articles/madisoncrime.htm

[5] Richard P. Sevier, *Madison Parish Plantations and Landowners 1875-1979*, June 2011. Accessed on https://www.lagenweb.org/madison/taxrolls/plantationowners.htm

[6] *Slave Chooses Death Rather Than Returning to Master*, Baton Rouge Weekly Advocate, August 2, 1855. Accessed on https://www.lagenweb.org/madison/newspapers.htm

[7] *Crimes in Madison Parish*, Madison Journal, Centennial Edition, August 14, 1975. Accessed on https://www.lagenweb.org/madison/articles/madisoncrime.htm

[8] *Crimes in Madison Parish*, Madison Journal, Centennial Edition, August 14, 1975

jail and take him back to the plantation.[9] In C's resistance, another Madison Parish citizen who was helping Boykin take C, was injured.[10] For this, C was tried and convicted for "criminally shedding a white man's blood" and sentenced to death by hanging.[11] C declared that he would rather Madison Parish kill him than go back to his enslavement at Boykin's plantation.[12] C said that he was wiling to be hung if it meant that he would no longer "suffer the punishment that he would receive at the hands of his master."[13] Some empathetic citizens took it upon themselves to examine C's body and found that Boykin had branded C and that he had signs of inhumane cruelty.[14] The citizens petitioned to have the Governor commute C's sentence.[15]

With a history like this in Madison Parish, it is unsurprising that black people make up most of the incarcerated population.[16] Madison Parish Jail's beginnings are rooted in slavery, and it saw, in the reconstruction era, a desperate grasping by white citizens at the control they once had by operating under a new name – the law.

## Jail Characteristics

Madison Parish Jail has an operational capacity of thirty-six beds.[17] In 2022 and 2023 inspections, Madison Parish jail housed only men.[18] Twenty-eight in the 2022 report, and thirty in 2023.[19] Madison Jail's population are predominantly those awaiting trial.[20] Basic Jail Guideline Inspection Reports indicate that in 2022, one of Madison's twenty-three prisoners was a DOC prisoner, and in 2023, two of Madison's thirty people were DOC prisoners.[21] The single DOC man was housed by himself in a single bunk, and the between the two DOC men, one was in a single bunk and one was double bunked.[22] The reports do not indicate if the single-bunked DOC man was also the one counted in the 2022 Report; if it was, this means he was in Madison Parish Jail for at least two years.

Madison has a decent-sized outdoor yard for the capacity.[23] However, the men incarcerated there have alleged that they aren't allowed proper access to outdoor recreation.[24] To be compliant with the Basic Jail Guidelines, Madison Jail allows them one recreational hour per day "if the weather permits."[25] The inspector who investigated their complaints wrote that

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Vera Institute of Justice, *Louisiana Locked Up: A Problem in Every Parish – Madison Parish*
[17] James M. Le Blanc, *BJG Monitoring Report: Madison Parish Jail*, February 3, 2023
[18] Ibid.; James M. Le Blanc, *BJG Monitoring Report: Madison Parish Jail*, January 12, 2024
[19] Ibid.
[20] Vera Institute of Justice, *Louisiana Locked Up: A Problem in Every Parish – Madison Parish*
[21] James M. Le Blanc, *BJG Monitoring Report: Madison Parish Jail*, February 3, 2023; James M. Le Blanc, *BJG Monitoring Report: Madison Parish Jail*, January 12, 2024
[22] Ibid.
[23] Google Earth, *404 East Green Street, Tallulah, Louisiana 71282,* December 2023
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Madison Jail's recreation logs reflected that the prisoners were offered recreation unless there was inclement weather.[26] The reports do not go into how credible the logs are, but at face-value, this fact seems easily manipulated by those employed at Madison Parish Jail.

There is no infirmary.[27] If anyone needs medical attention, they must be taken out through security and transported to Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC) in St. Gabriel, which is three and a half hours away by car.[28] Once a sick or injured person arrives to Hunt Correctional Center, they will have to go through search again and then wait, possibly for hours or days, for medical attention due to understaffing and overpopulation. Having to make an entire day trip to transport someone from Tallulah to St. Gabriel is very inconveniencing and costly. It's reasonable to assume that employees may meet medical requests with accusations of malingering and passive disregard because it is such an ordeal to get someone to an infirmary. Perhaps to mitigate the possible issues with an infirmary so inaccessible, Madison does have access to sick-call and an on-call nurse.[29]

## Jail Leadership

Sheriff Chad Ezell is the Madison Parish Sheriff. He was elected in 2023 over the then current Madison Sheriff, Sammie Byrd.[30] The election appears to have been highly contentious. In the general election, Ezell and Byrd ended in a tie, both with 50% of the parish vote.[31] The results of the runoff election won it for Ezell by a slim twenty-two votes.[32] In social media campaigns, Ezell publicly posted on Facebook "We need to elect a new sheriff, and I stand ready to be that guy,"[33] and "we need a CHANGE."[34] Byrd is a member of the Republican party, and Ezell is registered as Independent.[35] Madison Parish citizens have also taken to social media to express their discontent with the former sheriff. Facebook post threads read "Crime happens everywhere, however, with the size of Madison Parish you would think the Police Department and Sheriff Department would be working together to help aide and become proactive versus reactive," and "we need to look at the money trail, corruption, and the current state of the parish. Has anyone taken a deep dive into who is walking to the mailbox and collecting checks from the prison?" One Madison citizen posted, "The incumbent's family has created fake profiles to fool adults into voting against the opponent," she continued, "Do you really want these people in charge of your prisons and law enforcement? Do you know who benefits the most when one of your children is incarcerated? Do you want to vote for someone that stoops this low, and in the most condescending ignorant way? Hiding like an elephant behind a light pole, I guess it's the

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.; *Elayn Hunt Correctional Center*, Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections
[29] Ibid.
[30] Blake Bell, *Ezell Edges Byrd by 22 Votes in Sheriff's Race; Recount Not Automatic in Louisiana*, The Madison Journal, November 21, 2023
[31] Madison Remrey, *Madison Parish Sheriff race heading into recount*, KNOE News 8, November 18, 2023
[32] Blake Bell, *Ezell Edges Byrd by 22 Votes in Sheriff's Race; Recount Not Automatic in Louisiana*, The Madison Journal, November 21, 2023
[33] Chad Ezell, *Chad Ezell for Madison Parish Sheriff*, Facebook, October 14, 2023.
[34] Chad Ezell, *Chad Ezell for Madison Parish Sheriff*, Facebook, October 12, 2023.
[35] Madison Remrey, *Madison Parish Sheriff race heading into recount*, KNOE News 8, November 18, 2023

best they can do."[36] With claims of corruption and dissatisfaction surrounding the Sheriff's Office, Chad Ezell took on the role and officially entered office in 2024.[37]

Before he was elected Sheriff, Ezell worked with the MPSO for 28 years. He was a correctional officer at Madison Parish Jail, a jailer-dispatcher, patrol deputy, criminal/narcotics investigator, and lastly as chief criminal deputy.[38] In 2025, Sheriff Ezell led the MPSO to join the Louisiana ICAC Task Force (Internet Crimes Against Children)[39], which is a program designed to help local law enforcement agencies investigate and prosecute internet crimes against children including online predators, CSAM (child sex abuse material), and other forms of technological exploitation.[40] Jarrate Brooks is the Madison Parish Jail Warden.[41] Other information about the leadership of and current news about the Madison Parish Jail is unknown due to a lack of transparency.

## Deaths and News Coverage

I sent Public Records Requests for deaths in custody since 2015 to Sheriff Ezell and Madison Parish Jail multiple times with no response. I sent my request letter through email, snail mail, and fax. I called different phone numbers that were listed online as Madison Parish Jail's office. Some of the numbers led nowhere, and some were answered by people who could not help me. Eventually, I was able to speak directly with Jarrate Brooks, the warden. I explained what records I needed and that I have been trying to send the request letters to him multiple ways. He told me to email it to him directly at jarratebrooks@madisonso.com. I realized then that the email we had on file for him was incorrect. In March 2026, Warden Brooks responded to my Public Records Request Letter with a Zero Deaths Letter.[42] I researched news articles for evidence contradicting Madison Parish Jail's zero deaths claim, but I could not find anything. Whether the reason for that is a lack of transparency, or that they really had no deaths since 2015, I do not know.

In my research of news articles about Madison Parish Jail, I came across some interesting stories. In 2018, seven men escaped the Madsion Parish Jail by climbing over one of the fences.[43] Three of them were caught almost immediately, but the other four weren't found for nine hours.[44] The four men were Joshua Lewis, 25; Earl Hollins, 23; Devario R. Truner, 35; and Leedarius Rogers, 24.[45] The search for the men resulted in a neighboring public high school being on lockdown until 4:15pm because the Louisiana State Police believed them to be in the

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[36] Tallulah Let's Talk. *How satisfied are you with the current Sheriff in Madison Parish?* Facebook. October 17, 2023.
[37] Louisiana Sheriff's Association, *Madison Parish Directory.* Accessed on https://lsa.org/directory/madison-parish/
[38] Chad Ezell, *Chad Ezell for Madison Parish Sheriff*, Facebook, May 15, 2023.
[39] Office of the Louisiana Attorney General, *The Madison Parish Sheriff's Office, Led by Sheriff Chad Ezell, have also joined the Louisiana ICAC Task Force*, Facebook, August 27, 2025
[40] Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program*, Accessed https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/internet-crimes-against-children-task-force-program#overview
[41] Louisiana Sheriff's Association, *Madison Parish Directory.* Accessed on https://lsa.org/directory/madison-parish/
[42] Aala Abdullahi, *After a Death Behind Bars, Families Struggle for Answers. This Guide Can Help.,* The Marshall Project, August 6, 2025
[43] KTBS-TV, *UPDATE: Escaped North Louisiana inmates back in custody*, September 12, 2018
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

area.[46] Articles do not indicate if the men were brought back to the Madison Parish Jail, or if they entered the custody of a higher security facility.

Madison had another escape as recently as 2025. Raymond Howard, incarcerated at Madison Parish Jail, who had already escaped custody four times before, was transported to the St. Landry Parish Courthouse for a court appearance on July 5, 2025.[47] He escaped on the van ride back to Madison Parish Jail by waiting until the van stopped at a stop sign and popping the glass off of a back window and jumping out of it.[48] Howard wasn't found until April 2025 in Houston, Texas.[49]

## Conclusion

There is not much information available about the conditions and prisoner statistics at Madison Parish Jail. Additionally, there is conflicting information due to the number of carceral facilities in Madison Parish and the similarity in facility names. For example, in my research, some articles read "Madison Parish Jail," but were actually about the much larger Madison Parish Correctional Center located at 158 Treatment Plant Road. The lack of transparency and barriers to obtaining facts could be the results of incompetence, ignorance, or it could be an intentional blurring of the viewfinder through which we examine the practices and conditions of confinement at Madison Parish Jail.

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[46] Ibid.

[47] MJ Sampson, *Escaped inmate Raymond Howard captured in Harris County*, KLFY.com - Acadiana's Local News Leader, April 13, 2026 ; *Fugitive caught in Channelview previously escaped authorities 4 times, Louisiana officials say*, ABC 13 Eyewitness News, April 13, 2026

[48] *Fugitive caught in Channelview previously escaped authorities 4 times, Louisiana officials say*, ABC 13 Eyewitness News, April 13, 2026

[49] MJ Sampson, *Escaped inmate Raymond Howard captured in Harris County*, KLFY.com - Acadiana's Local News Leader, April 13, 2026