

**TO:** Professors Armstrong and Kumar

**FROM:** David Beck

**Re:** “Better Know a Jail” Memo

**DATE:** November 29, 2022

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## Ascension Parish Jail

### I. Introduction

Ascension Parish is located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, having its seat in Donaldsville.<sup>1</sup> The other major metropolitan areas include Prairieville and Gonzales.<sup>2</sup> It’s total population is around 126,500, according to the 2020 census.<sup>3</sup> The Ascension Parish Jail (“the Jail”) is located at 2384 Leman Cutoff Road, Donaldsville, LA, 70346.<sup>4</sup> The current jail was built originally in 1976 and has been expanded several times, with the most recent expansion completed in 2008 at a cost of \$10 million.<sup>5</sup> The jail is under the control of Warden Paul Hill since 2011.<sup>6</sup>

### II. Jail Characteristics

The Jail currently has a capacity of 572 inmates.<sup>7</sup> According to the Jail’s Inmate Search, there are 446 people currently in custody, making the Jail at 78% capacity.<sup>8</sup> There are 55 inmates (all male) from the Department of Corrections, and of those inmates, 49.09% are black, 47.27% are white, and 1.82% are Latinx.<sup>9</sup> During the month of November 2022, there have been 96 people booked into the Jail.<sup>10</sup> Of those 96, 46.86% are black, 48.96% are white, and the remaining 4.18% are Latinx.<sup>11</sup>

As previously stated, the Jail is managed by Warden Paul Hill<sup>12</sup>, and the current Ascension Parish Sheriff is Bobby Webre.<sup>13</sup> Sheriff Webre has worked for the Ascension Parish Sheriff’s Office since 1985, beginning as a patrolman.<sup>14</sup> In 1991, he became a sergeant and within one year was promoted to lieutenant.<sup>15</sup> While lieutenant, Webre was an inaugural member

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<sup>1</sup> “Ascension Parish.” *Louisiana’s Sweet Spot*. <https://visitlasweetspot.com/ascension/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> “Quick Facts: Ascension Parish, Louisiana. *U.S. Census Bureau*.” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ascensionparishlouisiana/POP010220>.

<sup>4</sup> “Our Locations.” *Ascension Parish Sheriff’s Office*. <https://ascensionsheriff.com/our-locations>.

<sup>5</sup> “Jail History.” *Ascension Parish Sheriff’s Office*. <https://ascensionsheriff.com/jail-history>.

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

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> “Inmate Search.” *Ascension Parish Jail*. <https://inmate-inquiry.ascensionsheriff.com/NewWorld.InmateInquiry/AscensionParish?BookingFromDate=11%2F01%2F2022%2000%3A00%3A00&BookingToDate=11%2F28%2F2022%2023%3A59%3A59&InCustody=True&Facility=Ascension%20Parish%20Jail&Page=1>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Armstrong. “Loyola A. Armstrong Counts by Local Facilities.” <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ULxjn4TY1EX4T79OPA2XXk93S4qq6OnuVSMFa95iFD8/edit#gid=1319225265>. Last edited August 31, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> “Inmate Search.” *Ascension Parish Jail*. *supra* n.8.

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

<sup>12</sup> *supra* n.6.

<sup>13</sup> “Bobby Webre.” *Ascension Parish Sheriff’s Office*. <https://ascensionsheriff.com/staff/bobby-webre/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

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

of the Crisis Response Team and was in charge of warrants and court security.<sup>16</sup> In 1996, Webre was promoted to Captain and became the Warden of the Jail.<sup>17</sup> As warden, he led the last expansion to the facilities, helping reach the new capacity of 572 inmates.<sup>18</sup> In 2011, Webre was appointed to Lieutenant Colonel, and in 2016, he became Chief Deputy.<sup>19</sup> On January 3, 2019, he was appointed to Sheriff, and he was elected to that same position ten months later.<sup>20</sup>

During Webre's tenure, the Jail has earned accreditation through the American Correctional Association<sup>21</sup>, and it began the production of an annual report, which offers community members information about the Jail's budget and practices, crime statistics, employees, awards, disaster relief protocol, and other factors viewed as positive by the Sheriff's Office.<sup>22</sup> According to his statement in the newest report, Webre is committed to the "highest quality public safety" and to providing transparency and support to residents of Ascension Parish.<sup>23</sup>

The Jail's website is informative, providing many details about the facility, its history, its inmates, and more. The website is [ascensionsheriff.com](http://ascensionsheriff.com). The website is fairly intuitive and informative, particularly for a parish the size of Ascension. On the home page, readers are given six options for different pages ("About Us," "Divisions/Units/Sections," "Staff Directory," "Contact Us," "Career Opportunities," and "Our Locations"), but there are far more pages within the site. The viewer can click on the latest special report; they can read a message from Sheriff Webre; they can view pictures of most wanted persons and captured persons; and they can select from a list fourteen other items, including but not limited to accident reports, press releases, and online ticket payment. The website provides clear information and instructions on several expected items and actions and also gives full biographies for every staff member of the Sheriff's Office.

The Jail's budget can be found in the 2022 Special Report, as well as on the Ascension Parish Government Website.<sup>24</sup> According to both sources, the Sheriff's Office has a revenue of \$49.8 million, and the Office spent \$48.45 million during 2021, giving it a surplus of around \$1.36 million.<sup>25</sup> Of that amount, the Jail had a general budget of \$4.406 million, adopted for 2022.<sup>26</sup> Of that amount, \$296,000 is used for personnel/salaries.<sup>27</sup> The largest line item is transfers at \$1.5 million dollars.<sup>28</sup>

### **III. Transparency Practices**

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<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> See 2022 Special Report. *Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office*. [specialreport.ascensionsheriff.com](http://specialreport.ascensionsheriff.com). Discussed further *infra* Section III.

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

<sup>24</sup> "2022 Annual Budget." *Ascension Parish Government Budget*, Adopted November 18, 2022. <http://www.ascensionparish.net/downloads/finance/2022AdoptedBudgetBook.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> 2022 Special Report. *Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office*. [specialreport.ascensionsheriff.com](http://specialreport.ascensionsheriff.com)

<sup>26</sup> "2022 Annual Budget." *supra* n.24 at 198-99.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 201.

The Jail's Special Report is perhaps its most transparent method of relaying information; however, the Report is part of a marketing campaign and information shared within it is done in a strategic way. The Report gives a clear breakdown of the Sheriff's Office budget and provides readers with the specific ways money was spent.<sup>29</sup> This information, however, is shared with copy painting the Sheriff in the best light. For example, the budget breakdown reads that Webre "was able to effectively manage the APSO budget,"<sup>30</sup> but it doesn't explicitly define that phrase. There is also a portion called "2021 By The Numbers," providing rudimentary and relatively non-descript crime statistics. For example, under "Homicides," the page says 7 with 6 "solved through arrests."<sup>31</sup> The Report is highly effective, however, and it does provide useful information. According to the Report, the Sheriff's Office recently reinstated the K-9 division to aid narcotics investigations; the Crisis Response Team helped in at least four events, including an escape from the Jail; and the Communications Division played an integral role in Hurricane Ida relief.<sup>32</sup>

The Sheriff's Office website does provide a link for public records requests.<sup>33</sup> The page provides clear instructions for what types of items the Sheriff's Office will not provide from a request, most of which are items related to on-going criminal investigations.<sup>34</sup> The Office only takes requests by mail, and the website provides the mailing address. The Office also charges for public records, if they are released. Documents are \$1 per page; photographs are \$5 per page; and audio/video recordings are \$1 per minute and \$10 per disc.<sup>35</sup> The page is instructional and provides phone numbers and a contact form for questions; however, in practice, getting an answer to a request is not so simple. After mailing an initial request in late August, I have been put off multiple times by the Warden and other staff, being told that the Office is waiting for its legal team to provide direction regarding my request.

#### **IV. Oversight**

During Sheriff Webre's tenure as Warden, the Jail gained accreditation from the American Correctional Association.<sup>36</sup> During the last year, however, the Sheriff's Office received accreditation from the Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).<sup>37</sup> The Jail is one of only four facilities in Louisiana with this accreditation.<sup>38</sup> The process took over three years and included evaluation of every policy and practice of the Jail.<sup>39</sup> According to the Special Report, the Sheriff's Office will continue to develop new accountability and transparency practices to keep the accreditation.<sup>40</sup> For example, the Sheriff's Office has

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<sup>29</sup> See 2022 Special Report. [https://uploadssl.webflow.com/62ffa7f4b34f727c39a6c2cb/633c299c5c0a33f7f51e909e\\_APSO\\_Special-Report20221003WEBsmall.pdf#page=8](https://uploadssl.webflow.com/62ffa7f4b34f727c39a6c2cb/633c299c5c0a33f7f51e909e_APSO_Special-Report20221003WEBsmall.pdf#page=8).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> See "Public Records Request." *Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office*. <https://ascensionsheriff.com/public-records-request/>.

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

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

<sup>36</sup> See *supra* n.13.

<sup>37</sup> See 2022 Special Report. [https://uploadssl.webflow.com/62ffa7f4b34f727c39a6c2cb/633c299c5c0a33f7f51e909e\\_APSO\\_Special-Report\\_20221003\\_WEB\\_small.pdf#page=4](https://uploadssl.webflow.com/62ffa7f4b34f727c39a6c2cb/633c299c5c0a33f7f51e909e_APSO_Special-Report_20221003_WEB_small.pdf#page=4).

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

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

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

since implemented body cameras.<sup>41</sup>

The Parish Council also provides a level of oversight, particularly regarding the budget. According to the Council Secretary Website, the Jail was discussed as an agenda item 20 times during the last two years.<sup>42</sup> The most recent meeting about the Jail specifically involved upgrades to the plumbing system, specifically the need for an extension due to a delay of materials and rising levels of the Mississippi River.<sup>43</sup>

The biggest change in the management of the Jail occurred on August 11, 2022, when all of the operations and maintenance of the Jail was officially transferred to the Sheriff's Office.<sup>44</sup> According to Sheriff Webre, this agreement will allow him to give a "more holistic approach to jail operations."<sup>45</sup>

## **V. Deaths in Custody and Trends Therein**

Because of the Jail's delay in responding to my records request, I am unaware of any inmate's deaths this year. The last recorded death occurred in January of 2020, and the record is provided on the Incarceration Transparency Website.<sup>46</sup> There was also one death in 2018, but the record provided by the Sheriff's Office does not include a name, only identifying the inmate as a male.<sup>47</sup>

## **VI. Notable Cases and Incidents**

There have been several cases and complaints filed and decided over the last five years, with one involving conditions of confinement occurring this year. In *Darville v. Hall*, 2022 WL 16626747 (M.D. La. April 28, 2022), the plaintiff Darville alleged that the Jail did not have a legal library nor did it provide legal counsel or services.<sup>48</sup> Magistrate Judge Richard Bourgeois concluded that Darville failed to state a claim over which the court had jurisdiction, noting that the alleged failure to provide adequate legal services and materials did not have an injurious effect on his particular case.<sup>49</sup> Further, Darville was apparently unable to show that an inadequate legal library hindered him from filing a claim.<sup>50</sup> Darville also made an allegation about conditions regarding a lack of free razors and sanitary napkins.<sup>51</sup> Bourgeois stated that prisons do not have to be comfortable; a lack of razors is not a denial of "the minimal civilized measure of

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<sup>41</sup> See 2022 Special Report, *supra* n.22.

<sup>42</sup> See "New Agenda and Minutes." *Ascension Parish Council Secretary*. <http://www.ascensionparish.net/new-agendas-and-minutes/>.

<sup>43</sup> See "8/18/2022 Council Meeting." *Ascension Parish Louisiana Civil Clerk*. <http://www.ascensionparishla.civicclerk.com>.

<sup>44</sup> Alison Bruhl. "APSO to take over jail operations in agreement with parish government." *Baton Rouge Proud*. 08/11/2022. <https://www.brproud.com/news/local-news/apso-to-take-over-jail-operations-in-agreement-with-parish-government/>.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Alsay-Keith-Ascension-2020-Report.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Unknown-Male-Ascension-2018-CJ9.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> *Darville v. Hall*, 2022 WL 16626747 (M.D. La. April 28, 2022).

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at \*4.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at \*3.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.* at \*4.

life's necessities"; and the need for sanitary napkins implicates female inmates, which the plaintiff is not.<sup>52</sup> Bourgeois recommended the claims be dismissed with prejudice,<sup>53</sup> which the district court adopted in November.<sup>54</sup>

On December 22, 2021, the Court of Appeal of Louisiana for the First Circuit affirmed a conviction and sentence in *State v. Caire*.<sup>55</sup> The defendant, Lionel Caire, was charged and convicted of simple escape and was adjudicated as a habitual offender.<sup>56</sup> The escape happened at the Ascension Parish Jail on May 21, 2015.<sup>57</sup>

In *Dill v. Wiley*, 315 So. 3d 878 (La. App. 1 Cir. 11/06/20), petitioner Timothy Dill was formerly imprisoned at Ascension Parish Jail and claimed he was falsely imprisoned because of an alleged failure to provide credit for time served.<sup>58</sup> The First Circuit concluded that the false imprisonment claim was procedurally barred due to a failure to make the claim within one year of imprisonment.<sup>59</sup> Although Dill filed for post-conviction relief, that process did not halt the prescriptive period required for filing claims like false imprisonment.<sup>60</sup>

Those three cases are the most relevant to conditions of confinement and custody at the Jail from the last five years.

This past year, an inmate did escape the Jail. James Smith successfully escaped, but he was captured within one quarter-mile of the Jail.<sup>61</sup> Also, during this past year, Deputy Matthew Hall was fired for releasing a video of inmates fighting.<sup>62</sup> The video captured security footage of inmates pushing and hitting each other on the threshold of a door with a guard trying to break them up.<sup>63</sup>

## **VII. Conclusion**

Overall, the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office provides most of the necessary information about the Jail on its website, although the claimed transparent practices of the Jail and the Sheriff's Office may not be as real as stated because of a hesitance to fulfill public records requests. The Sheriff's Office Annual Special Report is highly valuable for advocacy groups and attorneys. Also, the Ascension Parish Council provides adequate information about the Jail's budget as well as hearings before the Council.

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<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at \*5.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at \*8.

<sup>54</sup> *Darville v. Hall*, 2022 WL 16625533 (M.D. La. Nov. 1, 2022) (slip copy).

<sup>55</sup> *State v. Caire*, 2021 WL 6066838, 2021-0492 (La. App. 1 Cir. 12/22/21).

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at \*1.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Dill v. Wiley*, 315 So. 3d 878, 808 (La. App. 1 Cir. 11/06/20).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 881.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> See "Deputies capture inmate who escaped Ascension Parish Jail." *WAFB9*. Apr. 22, 2022.

<https://www.wafb.com/2022/04/22/manhunt-deputies-searching-inmate-who-escaped-ascension-parish-jail/>.

<sup>62</sup> See "Sheriff: Deputy fired after leaking video of Ascension jail brawl." *WBRZ*. September 02, 2022.

<https://www.wbrz.com/news/sheriff-investigating-how-video-of-ascension-jail-fight-leaked-onto-social-media/>.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*