

TO: Professor Armstrong  
FROM: Sheldon Ballom  
DATE: December 7, 2021  
RE: Bossier Parish Max. Sec. Jail Memo

### **Number of Deaths Since 2014<sup>1</sup>**

Bossier Parish Maximum Security Facility, according to data collected by the class this semester, is a prison that has had few deaths since 2014. During the PRA process, the CJ-9's provided by the parish prison showed 3 deaths since 2014 with the last death occurring in 2017. The three deaths documented showed that the most common causes of death were suicide by hanging, accidental alcohol/drug intoxication, and medical illness.

All of the deaths that occurred happened while the prisoner was Pre-Trial. Each of the prisoners were incarcerated no longer than 20 days before their deaths; as young as 23 years old, and as old as 54 at the time of their death. Additionally, the deaths of the inmates occurred in the general housing unit of the prison, in the evening between 6pm to midnight.<sup>2</sup>

### **Jail Characteristics**

Bossier Parish Maximum Security Facility sits on the property of the address: 2985 Old Plain Dealing Rd., Plain Dealing, LA 71064. The prison is at the Bossier Sheriff Complex, north of Benton, LA.<sup>3</sup> The facility opened in 2005 to house displaced inmates after Hurricane Katrina. Bossier Parish Maximum Security Facility houses 544 inmates and boasts about 1390 bookings a year across Bossier Parish.<sup>4</sup> The facility is divided into four cell blocks, three of which house men and one which houses women.<sup>5</sup> Research showed minimal information regarding the demographics of the facility, however, in the information was provided on the Sheriff's Office website it was found that the prison houses a majority of Black inmates, then White inmates, then Hispanic Inmates.

The current leadership of the prison is overseen by Julian Whittington. He has served as Sheriff of Bossier Parish since 2012.<sup>6</sup> Sheriff Whittington has been in civil service since 1980 and

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<sup>1</sup> The following information is related to data gathered through the semester-long PRA request project compiled in Fall 2021, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> This information is from the CJ-9 information collected through the PRA request.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bossiersheriff.com/maximum-security-facility/>

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

<sup>5</sup> <https://prodeathpenalty.com/louisiana/county-jail/bossier-parish-maximum-security-facility>

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

has trained at the FBI National Academy.<sup>7</sup> He has several professional and civic affiliations and serves as Board Vice-President of the Livestock Brand Commission.<sup>8</sup>

Overseeing the grounds of the prison is Warden Makesha Harris-Evans. Warden Harris-Evans has over thirty-four years of experience in the corrections field. Other facility overseers are Chief Criminal Deputy Duane Huddleston and Criminal Operations Chief Tony Staton.

The prison's budget for 2021 was \$8,320,628.<sup>9</sup> Also, in 2019 the prison received \$1 million to provide security upgrades. These upgrades included updating the security cell system and module panels that control the electronic cells.<sup>10</sup>

### **Evidence of Oversight**

Bossier Parish Maximum Security Facility's only oversight comes from a 2017 Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Audit.<sup>11</sup> In 2015, the Bossier Parish Corrections Bureau set the example for all other parish agencies by passing the PREA audit with 100% compliance of all the federal standards established in the Prison Rape Elimination Act.<sup>12</sup> The facility, however, is not listed as an accredited institution by any national accreditation association.<sup>13</sup>

The Maximum-Security Facility has been audited several times in recent years.<sup>14</sup> It passed its most recent audit (2021) conducted independently.<sup>15</sup> From the research, it was revealed that the Louisiana Legislative Auditor performed a financial audit on the facility in 2017.<sup>16</sup>

The City of Bossier, which posts meeting minutes on their website, holds meetings bi-weekly on parish matters.<sup>17</sup> The Maximum-Security Facility, or any of the facilities for that matter, are rarely discussed.<sup>18</sup> When the facility is on the agenda it is for budgetary matters only.<sup>19</sup> There have been no judicial orders or consent decrees in effect at the facility in recent times.

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

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.lsa.org/bossier-parish>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bossiersheriff.com/maximum-security-facility/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://bossierpress.com/bossier-max-to-get-1m-in-equipment-upgrades/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bossiersheriff.com/files/formuploads/2017%20Annual%20PREA%20Report.pdf>

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

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.aca.org/ACA/ACA\\_Member/Standards\\_and\\_Accreditation/SAC\\_AccFacHome.aspx?WebsiteKey=139f6b09-e150-4c56-9c66-284b92f21e51&hkey=f53cf206-2285-490e-98b7-66b5ecf4927a&CCO=2#CCO](https://www.aca.org/ACA/ACA_Member/Standards_and_Accreditation/SAC_AccFacHome.aspx?WebsiteKey=139f6b09-e150-4c56-9c66-284b92f21e51&hkey=f53cf206-2285-490e-98b7-66b5ecf4927a&CCO=2#CCO)

<sup>14</sup>

[https://app.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/B8C3AF86194A33EB862587880072F65E/\\$FILE/00024F2C.pdf](https://app.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/B8C3AF86194A33EB862587880072F65E/$FILE/00024F2C.pdf)

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

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

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bossiercity.org/agendacenter>

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

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

## Evidence of Transparency

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety seems to do a pretty thorough job of transparency when it comes to the state prisons, however, when it comes to the more localized, they leave it to the city. Parish prisons are nowhere to be seen on those reports, and typically news outlets are the ones who expose the incidents that occur inside of the Bossier Facilities.<sup>20</sup>

Bossier Parish Maximum Security Facility is not very transparent based on the research and findings.<sup>21</sup> It's last press release was dating on August 18, 2020, and there has not been a more recent release since.<sup>22</sup> The Sheriff's Office maintains a "Currently Housed Inmates" webpage, complete with offender profiles, mugshots, bookings history, and a "Notify Me When Released" option. Inmates can be searched and sorted by name, book date, age, and sex.<sup>23</sup>

The Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office posts an annual report that allows the public to see the successes of the Sheriff's Office and state of the facilities in the parish. From the research, the office boasts high arrests and number of cases closed.

Jail advocacy and research groups have not yet discussed the facility, nor has there been any information about prison reform. There has been a lack of transparency within the facility and this lack of complete transparency could be attributed to jail officials' lack of knowledge and experience in responding to public records requests. Even in my own experience when filing PRAs with the facility, it indicated there were deaths for the years 2020 and 2021, but they could not be released based on the public records request.

## Recent Cases

The facility has not been the center of many controversies in the last five years. However, based on a Southern Poverty Law Center Report, most recently, a pro se inmate filed a complaint in federal court alleging poor conditions at the jail: overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, poor nutrition, overpriced commissary, and the practice of favoritism to certain inmates.<sup>24</sup> The second lawsuit alleged gender discrimination by a female staff member who was passed over for a promotion.<sup>25</sup> Finally, no lawsuits were filed by the families of the deceased inmates from the years 2014-2021.

## Conclusion

Sheriff Whittington has achieved public support and relative success, as evidenced by his consecutive reelections, in his management of the Bossier Maximum-Security Facility. The

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ksla.com/story/36360929/authorities-inmate-accidentally-fell-died-while-in-bossier-jail/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.bossiersheriff.com/news/bossier-detectives-investigating-human-remains-found-on-the-red-river/>

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

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

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/leg\\_special\\_report\\_racial\\_final.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/leg_special_report_racial_final.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

facility succeeds in that it has functioning website, it stays within its budget, and it has provided improvements to the facility. It lacks in transparency, especially in the area of public records requests. Compared to other jails' cooperation and transparency regarding public records requests, the facility is equally cooperative, yet far less transparent.