

TO: Professor Andrea Armstrong

FROM: Kambrie Bethard

RE: “Better Know a Jail” Memo

Date: December 7th, 2021

Cameron Parish Jail Memorandum

Introduction

On January 18, 1998, the Cameron Parish County Jail Division turned into a reality when the Cameron Parish County leading body of Province Chiefs moved the duty regarding the Region Prison to the Cameron Parish County Sherriff’s Office. Cameron Parish Jail encompasses 314,000 square feet, built in January 1994 and had following redesigns in 2007 and 2009.¹ Today, the goals of Cameron Parish Jail are to seek, understand, and address the underlying issues that lead to calls for service and prides itself in accomplishing these goals through community involvement policing and an aggressive enforcement of state and local laws.² The Cameron Parish also believes that these collaborative efforts will significantly improve the quality of life for Cameron Parish residents and will enhance the experience of visitors.³

Jail Characteristics

The Cameron Parish Jail is a minimum-security facility located at 124 Recreation Center Lane, Cameron, Louisiana 70631. The Jail is located inside of the Cameron Parish Law Enforcement Complex. The facility is intended to detain adult, male and female, wrongdoers for as long as one year. The inmates may be awaiting trial or sentencing, or they may be serving sentences after being convicted of a crime.⁴ The jail has a capacity of 88 inmates, up to 16 women, 26 men, 8 juveniles, 2 isolation blocks, and 10 holding cells.⁵ The average jail admissions estimates since 2015 is 195 total jail admissions with only 30 in the jail population. Of the jail population reported in 2015, 5 are female and 25 are male.⁶

Live jail database can be accessed from Cameron Parish Jail main website at www.cameron.org. On the left-hand corner of the website there is a menu bar. On the menu bar, there is a section titled “Inmates.” This link will redirect you to Cameron Parish Detention Center Inmate Roster giving two options, “Current Inmates,” and “48-Hour Release.” The live jail database allows you to search by name and date, and also provides images of all the inmates allowing you to view all incarcerated persons. The inmate locator gives extensive information such as age, gender, race, booking date, the persons’ charges, and the bond amount. Most of the inmates who are being housed in the facility are awaiting pretrial.

¹ <https://wrpolice.org/louisiana/county-jail/cameron-parish-jail/>

² <https://www.cameronso.org>

³ Id.

⁴ <https://www.countyoffice.org/cameron-parish-jail-cameron-la-3c0/>

⁵ <https://www.cameronso.org/jail>

⁶ Id.

Based on the spreadsheet of data received from the Louisiana Department of Corrections, two white individuals are being housed and serving state time in the Cameron Parish Jail instead of a state operated prison. It is important to note here that this does not reflect the total population at the local jail, but instead the total Department of Corrections population housed in a local jail.

Visitation times within the jail are Tuesday and Friday from 10am to 3pm.⁷ Each inmate is allowed up to 3 visits on each visitation on each visitation day.⁸ The Correctional Officers must bring the inmates down for their visits. Leading up to the visitation, cell phones, purses, or hand bags are not allowed back in the visitation area.⁹

To deposit to an inmate's commissary, it must be in form of money order made out to the inmate. There are three options on how to put money on an inmate's account in Cameron Parish Jail. The first one being, dropping money at the jail in the inmates account, the second option, deposit inmate money through the online site for depositing funds, or thirdly, mail the inmate deposit to the jail in the form of a money order listing the inmate's name and their Inmate ID number.¹⁰

Jail Leadership

Sheriff Ron Johnson is the Cameron Parish Sheriff. He was elected as sheriff in 2011.¹¹ Ron Johnson was re-elected in 2015 with two opponents as Cameron Parish Sheriff and re-elected again on October 12, 2019.¹²

Sheriff Ron Johnson is a graduate of South Cameron High School and attended Sowela Technical School.¹³ He joined the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office in 1989 and has held the positions of Corrections Officer, Patrolman, Investigator, Supervisor, Crash Reconstruction Officer, D.A.R.E Officer, Grant Writer, Programs Director, Chief Investigator, and Chief Deputy. Sheriff Ron Johnson has over 5,000 hours of Law Enforcement, Leadership, and administrative training.¹⁴ He has the experience of serving Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office for over 30 years through his past obligations. Sheriff Ron Johnson's primary goals as Sheriff consist of being the Chief Law Enforcement Agency of the Parish, The Tax Collector, maintaining dispatch, 911 in Cameron Parish, criminal records, and a civil department.¹⁵ Via the Cameron Parish Jail website, you can find a message from the Sheriff which shares a positive outlook for the community to read and lists challenges that the Sheriff Office faces but are ready to accomplish.

⁷ <https://www.cameronso.org/jail>

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ <https://www.kplctv.com/2019/09/27/their-own-words-candidates-cameron-parish-sheriff/>

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Id.

Public Record Requests and Inmate Mortality

The Cameron Parish Jail website is easy to maneuver, however, it does not clearly state who to contact to receive public records request. For my initial public records request, I mailed a letter to Warden David French on August 31, 2021. On September 8th, I received a phone call from Warden French confirming that he had received my request and was interested in my assignment and was willing to answer all my questions.¹⁶ Shortly after my call with Warden French, I received an email confirming what he had stated on the phone, that the facility had zero deaths during the years January 1, 2020-present. To add, it was reported from a previous student's research that Cameron Parish Jail reported no deaths for the years 2014-2019. Warden French expressed Cameron Parish Sheriff's office participates in the Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Survey of Jails (ASJ). He explained that through this survey, all forms are completed and submitted and the sheriff's office keeps no records of the completed forms. Based on Cameron Parish Jail submitting their forms to ASJ and not saving the completed records, Warden French instead confirmed through the email that the facility has had no deaths.

My experience with Warden French and the Cameron Parish Jail was pleasant in comparison with other facilities I had to work with obtaining the same information. Warden French was professional and open to answer any questions. Cameron Parish Jail was the first and one of few that actually answered my public records request.

Jail Coverage and Oversight

In June 2015, an off-duty Cameron Parish sheriff's deputy, Derek Nothnagle was arrested on charges of possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, use and sale of drug paraphernalia, improper lane usage, following too closely and expired inspection decal.¹⁷ Sheriff Rob Johnson made a statement concerning the deputy's arrest stating that "his office takes a hardline approach on drugs" and as a result, Nothnagle was terminated.¹⁸

In June 2021, Devon Blake Badon, the plaintiff appearing pro se alleged and files his complaint as a Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus alleging that Cameron Parish deputies Craddock and LaPoint used excessive force, hitting his nose, using a taser multiple times and kneeling on his neck.¹⁹ The court ordered that the plaintiff amend his complaint within thirty (30) days of the filing of his initial order to cure deficiencies which lead to the plaintiff's claims being dismissed.²⁰

In May 2021, Jacob Dalton Coker, an inmate in custody at the Cameron Parish Jail, appears pro se and files a lawsuit and names the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office as the defendant.²¹ Coker complains of an illegal search that took place and states he was wrongfully charged. Coker, the plaintiff, did not raise his claim until well over a year later resulting in his lawsuit being barred by the statute of limitations.²²

¹⁶ Phone Call with Warden French on September 8, 2021.

¹⁷ <https://kpel965.com/sheriffs-deputy-caught-illegally-transporting-lots-of-pot/>

¹⁸ Id.

¹⁹ <https://casetext.com/case/badon-v-parish>

²⁰ Id.

²¹ <https://casetext.com/case/coker-v-sheriffs-office-cameron-par>

²² Id.

Concerning the jails conditions, there are no notable complaints in the last 5 years. The reviews on google give positive feedback from help received by sheriff officers.

The Louisiana Department of Corrections does not have any oversight on the Cameron Parish Jail because it is a local jail that is not owned by the Department of Corrections. As stated previously, Cameron Parish participates in reporting to the Annual Survey of Jails (ASJ). Annual Survey of Jails is the only data collection effort that provides an annual source of date on local jails and jail inmates.²³ Furthermore, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) under the United States Department of Justice requires Cameron Parish Jail to submit CJ-9 forms every year. Cameron Parish Jail supplies the Bureau of Justice Statistics with the information and Bureau of Justice Statistics is responsible for safekeeping the data of Cameron Parish Jail.

²³ <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/NACJD/studies/37392>