

TO: Professor Andrea Armstrong and Nishi Kumar

FROM: Patricio Ramos

RE: Facility Memo

DATE: November 29, 2022

City of Faith Monroe

Introduction

The City of Faith is an outreach program for those finishing up the remainder of their prison term.¹ A fun fact about the facility is that the owner Kathy Biedenharn opened the facility after her conversation with an inmate who was incarcerated in Louisiana State Prison.² She asked him what she could do for him, and he replied, "find me a place to live and a good-paying job."³ The rest is history. Since that conversation, she has opened eight facilities in the southeastern United States.⁴ The facilities I am researching are specifically the Monroe Houses. In the Monroe City of Faith operates five halfway homes, all located on one street.⁵ The goal of these facilities is to help inmates transition back into society with usable skills.⁶

Number of Deaths Since 2014 and Trends

I requested the deaths in custody report from the City of Faith Monroe. I was told there are no records responsive to my request. So, I asked to have that sent to me on official letterhead. I received that on November 16, 2022. Through my research, I discovered that there had been two deaths since 2014.⁷ One of the deaths found in custody is from 2015.⁸ The second death in custody since 2014 was in 2019.⁹ The only trend I noticed from the data was that both males died of adverse health conditions—specifically, asthma and cardiac arrest.¹⁰

¹ <https://cityoffaith.org/history/>

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ <https://cityoffaith.org/monroe-state/>

⁶ <https://cityoffaith.org/history/>

⁷ https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/?page_id=241

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2019-City-of-Faith-Monroe-House-Ouachita-CJ9s.pdf>

Jail Characteristics

City of Faith Monroe House is a small set of facilities run by City of Faith Prison Ministries INC.¹¹ The facility in Monroe has five halfway houses.¹² Four of the five houses are for state inmates.¹³ The other house is reserved for federal inmates.¹⁴ The facilities have a maximum capacity of 147 people.¹⁵ The population is men and women, mainly seeking substance abuse help, education and skill acquisition, housing assistance, family reintegration, and faith-based guidance.¹⁶ The facilities are located at 1814 Jackson Street and 1511 Jackson Street, Monroe, Louisiana, 71202.¹⁷ The facility is part of Ouachita Parish and is located in the Old Garden District of Monroe.¹⁸ The website for this specific location can be found at cityoffaith.org.¹⁹

The current leadership comprises the President, Kathy Biedenharn, and the vice President Rick Banks.²⁰ In addition, Deputy Executive Director Rick Banks oversees all facilities.²¹

The overall budget for all facilities under the Prison Ministries INC., not just Monroe House facilities, is \$5,861,822, and operating expenses of \$5,693,252, with net assets at \$3,210,244.²²

Evidence of Oversight

The City of Faith has maintained accreditation from the American Correctional Association since 1993.²³ City of faith is audited yearly by the PREA and is found to comply with the Prison Rape Elimination Act.²⁴ In addition to complying with the PREA, the audit monitors many services the facility provides and determines if they meet standards of compliance with the PREA.²⁵ In an audit

¹¹ <https://cityoffaith.org>

¹² <https://cityoffaith.org/monroe-state/>

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ <https://cityoffaith.org/monroe-federal/>

¹⁵ <https://cityoffaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/cofmonroeprea2015.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://cityoffaith.org/mission-vision/>

¹⁷ <https://cityoffaith.org/monroe-state/>

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Cityoffaith.org

²⁰ <https://cityoffaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/cofmonroeprea2015.pdf>

²¹ *Id.*

²² <https://nonprofitlight.com/la/monroe/city-of-faith-prison-ministries-inc>

²³ <https://cityoffaith.org/history/>

²⁴ <https://cityoffaith.org/prea-compliance/>

²⁵ <https://cityoffaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/PREA-Annual-Report-2021.pdf>

conducted on the facility in 2021, there were zero rapes and zero allegations of rape; additionally, there were zero acts of sexual violence.²⁶ I found no evidence of a consent decree relative to this facility during my research. Further, I found no evidence of a hearing related to the facility by the Parish the facility operates from or any city council members.

Evidence of Transparency

The facility is transparent in multiple areas of its operations. Their website has publicly available audits conducted by the PREA from 2014 to the present. These audits have information that was voluntarily given to the PREA to comply with their standards.²⁷ There is no evidence that they would be trying to suppress the data, as it is available on the front page of their website in an easy-to-see font.²⁸ Also, the website provides a link to their annual budget and financial plan.²⁹ The data on inmates is widely available. Through the PREA audit, the facility offers the sex, age range, inmates with disabilities, and inmates who are LGBTQ, as well as a complete roster of the entire staff.³⁰ The audit also shows the daily average population and the average length of stay per inmate.³¹

Additionally, the facility provides screening criteria when hiring staff to ensure they are not a threat to the inmates.³² They were transparent about my public records request to the facility. They didn't have any data they could provide me with for recent years. I was able to ask for that on official letterhead and delivered that document via email within 48 hours. Overall my experience with the City of Faith was smooth.

Notable Cases and/or Complaints on Conditions Over the Last Five Years

I couldn't find anything in the last five years. But I did see some cases and complaints dating back to 2002 and 2009 that may shed some light on the facility's recent positive trends in behavior. I can infer from this pattern that this facility may have corrected its adverse conduct from the past based on the following incidents. In *Jones v. City of Faith Prison Ministries*, an employee complained that the facility was "unsafe and illegal, including denying residents medical treatment,

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ <https://cityoffaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/City-of-Faith-Final-2021-PREA-Report.pdf>

²⁸ <https://cityoffaith.org/history/>

²⁹ <https://cityoffaith.org/prea-compliance/>

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ <https://cityoffaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/City-of-Faith-Final-2021-PREA-Report.pdf>

³² *Id.*

allowing residents to leave the facility unsupervised, and providing inadequate training.³³ On September 27, 2004, CFPM allegedly terminated Jones's employment because Jones expressed her concerns about the unlawful activities to CFPM's executive administrator and threatened to notify the Louisiana Department of Corrections.³⁴ The complaint was dismissed for failure to state a claim.³⁵

Another complaint against the facility was in 2009. The complaint was that a guard at the facility forced an inmate to have sex with him under the threat of sending her back to prison.³⁶ The officer's boss was accused of covering up the allegations by attempting to prevent the victim from going public.³⁷ She went public with the matter.³⁸ This past record of bad conduct may be why the City of Faith has a stellar record now with the PREA, and no rapes have been reported since they became compliant.³⁹

³³ *Jones v. City of Faith Prison Ministries*, 2006 WL 8456518

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ <https://www.courthousenews.com/city-of-faith-prison-ministriesaccused-of-sex-assault-coverup/>

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ <https://cityoffaith.org/prea-compliance/>