

TO: Professor Armstrong
FROM: Sarah Skidmore
DATE: December 7, 2021
RE: Memorandum on Tangipahoa Parish Jail

MEMORANDUM: TANGIPAHOA PARISH JAIL

I. Introduction

The Tangipahoa Parish Jail is a medium-security detention center in Hammond, Louisiana.¹ It was built in 1984, and has a maximum capacity of 504 men and 22 women², for a total of 526 people. A majority of the inmates held at the jail are parish detainees awaiting court appearances.³ The Tangipahoa Parish Jail is operated locally by the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff's Office.⁴ Although a local jail, it holds 215 Louisiana Department of Correction inmates: 40.93% are white, 58.14% are black, and 0.93% are Latinx.⁵ The mission of the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff's Office is "to provide the highest quality of public safety services to our community."⁶

II. Jail Characteristics

The Tangipahoa Parish Jail is located at 15475 Club Deluxe Road, Hammond, LA, 70403. The website for the jail is: <https://www.tpsso.org/tangipahoa-parish-prison>. The phone number for the jail is: 985-748-8147. The jail is in Tangipahoa Parish, which is approximately an hour northwest of New Orleans.

The Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff is Daniel Edwards.⁷ He has been sheriff since July 1, 2004.⁸ He is a graduate of Loyola University New Orleans College of Law and is a former Assistant District Attorney for the 21st Judicial District Court.⁹ He is the brother of Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards.¹⁰

The warden of the jail is Captain Heath Martin.¹¹ The website for the jail provides a brief overview of the jail's policies and procedures. Trustees perform cleaning and laundry chores at the jail.¹² Trustees also perform janitorial services at the parish courthouse, firing range, and work as litter crews on parish roads and highways.¹³ The website also details the jail's security

¹ <https://nodeathpenalty.org/louisiana/county-jail/tangipahoa-parish-prison/>

² <https://www.tpsso.org/tangipahoa-parish-prison>

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

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<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ULxjn4TY1EX4T79OPA2XXk93S4qq6OnuVSMFa95iFD8/edit?usp=sharing>

⁶ <https://www.tpsso.org/>

⁷ <https://www.tpsso.org/sheriff>

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ <https://apnews.com/article/cc4464d84bf34523864d44cf7a636182>.

¹¹ <https://www.tpsso.org/download/attachment/15565>

¹² <https://www.tpsso.org/tangipahoa-parish-prison>

¹³ *Id.*

features, stating that the jail has up-to-date security equipment and that it is surrounded by an eight-foot fence covered with razor wire.¹⁴

The website provides several notices to visitors, stating that all persons entering the jail are subject to search and are not allowed to bring in handbags or other personal items.¹⁵ The website also states that all visitors are required to present a valid government issued photo driver license or photo ID.¹⁶ The website further states that visitation for jail inmates is a “privilege of the inmate”, and that it may be “suspended or revoked for disciplinary or security reasons without any prior advance notification given.”¹⁷ A visitation schedule is attached to the website and provides a list of visitation times by dorm.¹⁸ Visitors are instructed to arrive 15 minutes before their visitation time, and are limited to 15 minutes of visitation time per inmate.¹⁹

The Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff’s Office financial report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2020 is posted on the Louisiana Legislative Auditor website.²⁰ The report states that the Sheriff’s Office expenses for the fiscal year were \$20.8 million, an increase of \$217,469 from the prior year.²¹ The ending balance for the end of the fiscal year was \$11,578,106.²² The Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff’s Office received \$2,275,376 in CARES Act funding.²³ Prison expenditures for the fiscal year totaled \$1,573,574.²⁴ Prison income totaled \$4,234,957.²⁵ The Sheriff and the Tangipahoa Parish government are currently in dispute over \$3,988,272 in certain costs and maintenance expenses for the jail.²⁶

III. Number of Deaths Since 2014 and Trends

There have been 8 reported deaths in Tangipahoa Parish Jail from 2014-2019. The jail responded to public record requests from Loyola University New Orleans College of Law for that time period, and reported 3 deaths in 2014, 1 death in 2015, 1 death in 2016, 1 death in 2017, 1 death in 2018, 1 death in 2019, and 0 deaths in 2020.²⁷ All forms received were the CJ-9 Deaths in Custody Reports.

A. 2014 Deaths²⁸

Ernie Hyde was admitted to the jail on December 13, 2011 and died on January 24, 2014. He was a white male. His date of birth was redacted so his age is unknown. He was there

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ <https://www.tpsso.org/download/attachment/15565>

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ [https://app.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/7A75CE4DFA703BF98625869B00595825/\\$FILE/00022FC1.pdf](https://app.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/7A75CE4DFA703BF98625869B00595825/$FILE/00022FC1.pdf)

²¹ *Id.* at 4

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.* at 15

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.* at 26.

²⁷ https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/?page_id=209

²⁸ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2014-Tangipahoa-Parish-Prison-Tangipahoa-CJ9s.pdf>

for a post-trial conviction and was serving time under the Louisiana Department of Corrections. He died in a medical facility outside of the jail facility, and his cause of death was labeled “illness.” No autopsy information was provided. It could not be determined whether Mr. Hyde had any preexisting conditions which contributed to his death.

Keith Joseph was admitted to the jail on February 19, 2014 and died on March 11, 2014. He was a black male. His date of birth was redacted so his age is unknown. He was there for a post-trial conviction. He died in a general housing unit within the jail facility, and his cause of death was labeled “illness.” It could not be determined whether Mr. Joseph had any preexisting conditions.

Following his death, Mr. Joseph’s family filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana against the Louisiana Department of Corrections and multiple prison employees. In the suit, the family alleges that after a week of complaining of severe chest pains, Mr. Joseph was seen by the on-duty nurse.²⁹ The nurse took his vital signs, but brought him back to his cell.³⁰ Mr. Joseph continued to complain of severe pain, but Officer Brock responded, “ain't nothing wrong with you, sit your motherfu***** as* down.”³¹ Mr. Joseph collapsed shortly after this conversation.³² His family alleged that Mr. Joseph was not administered CPR until 30 minutes after he collapsed.³³ He was pronounced dead later the same day.³⁴

Princeton Bowman was admitted to the jail on January 15, 2014 and died on August 29, 2014. He was a black male. His date of birth was redacted so his age is unknown. He was there for a parole violation and was under the supervision of the Louisiana Department of Corrections. He died while in transit, and his cause of death was labeled “illness.” The form states that the manner of death was natural, and it could not be determined whether Mr. Bowman had any preexisting conditions.

B. 2015 Deaths³⁵

Bobby Earl was admitted to the jail on August 1, 2012 and died on May 30, 2015. He was a black male. His date of birth was redacted so his age is unknown. He was there for a post-trial conviction. He died outside of the jail while on work release, “in a collapsing boat on the Mississippi River.” He died of an accidental drowning.

C. 2016 Deaths³⁶

Brady Williams was admitted to the jail on January 7, 2015 and died on September 23, 2016. He was a black male. His date of birth was redacted so his age is unknown. He was there

²⁹ *Joseph v. Louisiana Dep't of Corr.*, No. CIV.A. 15-0759, 2015 WL 5797830 (E.D. La. Oct. 2, 2015).

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Earl-Bobby-Tangipahoa-2015-CJ9.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2016-Tangipahoa-Parish-Prison-Tangipahoa-CJ9s.pdf>

for a post-trial conviction. He died in a special medical unit within the jail facility. His cause of death was listed as an “accidental alcohol/drug intoxication.” The details of his death were redacted.

D. 2017 Deaths³⁷

Tommy Smith was admitted to the jail on January 30, 2017 and died the same day. He was a white male. He was 40 years old at the time of his death.³⁸ He was in jail for a parole violation. He died in a general housing unit in his cell. His cause of death was homicide; he was beaten to death by other inmates.

Mr. Smith’s death led to litigation and reports on the conditions of the jail. The Associated Press did a story about Mr. Smith’s death and subsequent lawsuit by his family. The lawsuit claimed that Mr. Smith was jailed after he violated probation stemming from a 2015 conviction for a sex crime.³⁹ According to the lawsuit, staff at the jail did not segregate Smith from the other prisoners even though they knew that his criminal history made him vulnerable to attacks.⁴⁰

The suit claimed that the sheriff and warden “acted with deliberate indifference” in failing to adequately monitor inmates, provide secure cells, or properly identify and provide secure housing for “at-risk inmates.”⁴¹ The suit says that 12 inmates attacked Smith at approximately 1:45 a.m. on January 31, 2017.⁴² The sheriff’s office said in a statement following his death, that jail staff members regained control of the dormitory “within minutes” of the attack⁴³ The press release went on to say that “unfortunately, due to the number of individuals involved in the altercation, along with the incident occurring within a secured environment, our victim was limited with an escape. This type of environment provides many limitations when taking into account the safety of staff, emergency medical responders, as well as the inmates themselves.”⁴⁴ The coroner concluded that Smith died of blunt force trauma to the head with bleeding in his brain.⁴⁵ According to the lawsuit, the funeral home advised the family that the damage to Smith’s head was so severe that an open casket funeral would not be possible.⁴⁶

E. 2018 Deaths⁴⁷

Peggy Simoneaux was admitted to the jail on April 25, 2018 and died the same day. She was a white female. She was being held for violating a protective order and was unconvicted at

³⁷ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2017-Tangipahoa-Parish-Prison-Tangipahoa-CJ9s.pdf>

³⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/cc4464d84bf34523864d44cf7a636182;>

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2018-Tangipahoa-Parish-Prison-Tangipahoa-CJ9s.pdf>

the time of her death. Her cause of death was suicide by hanging. She died in a general housing unit in her cell.

A lawsuit filed by her family stated that the correctional officers spent “nearly 20 minutes fumbling for the key to a holding cell” while Ms. Simoneaux was “hanging by her prison-issue pants.”⁴⁸ The suit further claims that the officers could not access her jail cell because a power outage caused the cell’s electronic locks to malfunction, and the prison did not have a working backup generator.⁴⁹

In a statement to The Advocate, Sheriff Edwards stated that deputies accessed the cell “within a minute or two of realizing that she was dying by suicide.”⁵⁰ Edwards said Simoneaux denied having any desire to harm herself during her medical intake earlier in the day, and staff performed CPR and called an ambulance as soon as they discovered her.⁵¹

F. 2019 Deaths

Charles Williams was admitted to the jail on January 29, 2019 and died on March 5, 2019. He was a black male. His date of birth was June 25, 2001, making him 17 years old at the time of his death. He was in jail awaiting trial. He died in a common area within the facility. His cause of death was listed as “natural/unexpected.” The autopsy was released and determined that Mr. Williams died of “natural causes.”⁵² A news article stated that he had a history of asthma and had previously been transported from jail to the hospital for treatment for an allergic reaction.⁵³

G. Trends

Among these 8 reported deaths since 2014: four were medical, and the other four were from accident, drug overdose, violence, and suicide. Notably, the only death of a female inmate was by suicide. Three of these deaths led to lawsuits and news reports, and each of these deaths involved an inmate that died within the first 30 days of their incarceration. Two of the deaths occurred within 24 hours of the person being admitted into the jail (Smith and Simoneaux). Three of the deaths occurred over a year after being incarcerated. (Hyde, Earl, Williams). Notably, the accidental alcohol/drug intoxication death of Brady Williams over a year after he was booked into the jail suggests that the substance that ultimately killed him was smuggled into the jail after he was already there, raising concerns about jail security.

IV. Evidence of Oversight

The Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff’s Office (TPSO) has been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) since 2015.⁵⁴ As part of the accreditation process, CALEA assessors visit the Sheriff’s Office for a three-day inspection to

⁴⁸ https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/livingston_tangipahoa/article_131e66b8-a0d9-11e8-bb37-cf4ac5741e41.html

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² <https://www.wafb.com/2019/03/05/teen-with-history-asthma-dies-tangipahoa-parish-prison/>

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ <https://www.tpsso.org/about-us>

“examine the department’s policies and procedures, management, operations, and support services related to law enforcement.”⁵⁵ The process to be accredited by CALEA requires an “in-depth review and audit of every aspect of the department's organization, management, operations, and administration.”⁵⁶ It is unclear how much of these assessments were directly related to operations at the Tangipahoa Parish Jail.

A search on the CALEA website confirms that the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff’s Office has been accredited by the organization since July 25, 2015.⁵⁷ TPSO received reaccreditation on July 25, 2018.⁵⁸ The Accreditation Contact for TPSO is James Travis. His phone number is (985) 902-2079, and his email address is travisj@tpso.org.

The jail also has a policy against prison sexual violence, writing on its website: “the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff's Office has a zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual violence and sexual misconduct involving staff.”⁵⁹ The website published Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) reports for the years 2013-2015.⁶⁰ In the year 2015, there were 8 sexual abuse allegations.⁶¹ 1 was “substantiated”, 2 were “unsubstantiated”, and 5 were “unfounded.” There are no published reports after 2015, and the 2015 report was very short and general.

The jail undergoes a financial audit every fiscal year by the outside auditor, Diez, Dupuy & Ruiz, LLC.⁶² The last audit was completed on March 4, 2021.⁶³ The Tangipahoa Parish Council has a website in which it broadcasts its council meetings. The website also has a calendar for future meeting dates and posts the minutes of the meetings online. The information can be accessed at this website: <https://tangipahoa.org/council>. There have been no consent decrees in effect for the Tangipahoa Parish Police Department within the past five years.⁶⁴

V. Evidence of Transparency

The Tangipahoa Parish Police Department does news briefings and posts them on their website.⁶⁵ Sheriff Edwards made statements after the deaths of Tommy Smith and Peggy Simoneaux.⁶⁶ The press releases on the website do not really center around the jail, but rather involve more general information regarding public safety (crime stoppers, wanted persons, missing persons, etc.). Also, the statements regarding the inmate deaths are not on the TPSO website but are instead responses to news outlets.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ <https://www.calea.org/calea-client-database>

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ <https://www.tpso.org/about-us>

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ <https://www.tpso.org/download/attachment/14960>

⁶² [https://app.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/7A75CE4DFA703BF98625869B00595825/\\$FILE/00022FC1.pdf](https://app.lla.state.la.us/PublicReports.nsf/0/7A75CE4DFA703BF98625869B00595825/$FILE/00022FC1.pdf), at

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⁶³ *Id.* at 3.

⁶⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/797666/download>

⁶⁵ <https://www.tpso.org/news-releases>

⁶⁶ See *supra* notes 39 and 46.

The Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff's Office has an inmate locator on its website that provides general information including the names of persons incarcerated, their date of birth, race, gender, and arrest date.⁶⁷ As of December 4, 2021, there are 548 people currently incarcerated at the jail⁶⁸, 22 more than their stated capacity of 526. Of these inmates: 523 are male, and 25 are female. 338 inmates are black, 208 are white, 1 is American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1 is unknown. The website also has a feature where you can register anonymously to be notified of any changes in an inmate's custody status.⁶⁹

Overall, my experience while conducting public records requests with the Tangipahoa Parish Jail was frustrating. I sent my first request via email on September 13, 2021. Students from previous years contacted the law firm representing the jail so I did the same. After not receiving a response, I called the law firm, and they were very helpful. I did not receive the letter that they sent on September 14th, so they re-sent it. The letter stated that there was a delay because of Hurricane Ida, but that they would send out the requested information.

On October 12, the assistant warden, Lt. Sherry Brown emailed me directly stating that the CJ-9 Deaths In Custody report is no longer required to be done so she would "send the 2020 and that is all there is." However, the report that she sent was of the 2019 death of Charles Williams which Loyola had already received the previous year. Notably, the date of birth was not redacted on this copy compared with previous copies. This is useful information because it revealed that Mr. Williams was 17 years old at the time of his death.

I sent two emails on 11/20 and 11/21 acknowledging that I knew of the discontinuation of the CJ-9 forms and requested alternate forms or even just general information about any deaths in custody. On 11/24, the assistant warden emailed back stating: "I already explained the forms were discontinued in 2019. There are no forms that took its place." This unwillingness to send over any information after the discontinuation of the CJ-9 forms was not unique to Tangipahoa Parish, as several other facilities gave me similar responses.

VI. Notable cases or complaints on prison/jail conditions in the last 5 years

Section III previously mentioned lawsuits and news stories resulting from the deaths of Keith Joseph, Tommy Smith, and Peggy Simoneaux. Additionally, there were several lawsuits filed within the past 5 years against Tangipahoa Parish Jail. The following is a list of recent lawsuits that I found involving the Tangipahoa Parish Jail:

Wells v. Tangipahoa Parish Jail (10/7/2019 complaint involving prisoner civil rights)

Johnson v. Tangipahoa Parish Jail (10/15/2021 complaint involving prison conditions)

James v. Edwards (5/10/2021 complaint that plaintiff was denied access to clean water and was denied the right to exercise his religion)

Harold v. Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff Office (06/18/2021 complaint involving unsanitary conditions in a special holding cell)

⁶⁷ <http://www.tangipahoa.lavns.org/>.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

A news search of Tangipahoa Parish Jail revealed several news stories involving violence and conditions at the jail. Nola.com and The Advocate did a story about a 2019 lawsuit filed by former inmate, Joseph Martin against Sheriff Daniel Edwards and others, claiming that he was badly beaten in the jail.⁷⁰ The lawsuit describes the jail as an institution where “gang dominance, brutal beatings and deputies’ indifference were commonplace.”⁷¹ The lawsuit states that Mr. Martin was placed in the jail’s X tier, where, because of overcrowding, there were more inmates than beds, leading to fights among inmates.⁷² The lawsuit states that the tier was controlled by a “gang of inmates who terrorized Martin and others, frequently forcing inmates to fight each other.”⁷³ The lawsuit also contains allegations of drug smuggling within the jail.⁷⁴ The lawsuit also mentioned that there were six other cases since 2010 in which inmates were allegedly beaten and/or raped.⁷⁵

Another lawsuit filed in 2017 involved the rape and attack of “Jane Doe,” a transgender woman housed in the jail.⁷⁶ The lawsuit claims that the woman was beaten and repeatedly raped by a group of male inmates at the Tangipahoa Parish Jail while correction officers ignored her cries for help and refused to house her apart from the jail's general population.⁷⁷ The lawsuit claimed that she begged the guards "to protect her from the brutal acts of the other inmates" but the guards were first indifferent, and later threatened that she would be shot if she did not "shut up."⁷⁸ The lawsuit also states that jail officials were aware of the woman's gender from the beginning, but failed to place her in secure housing separate from the general population.⁷⁹

This article revealed a troubling pattern of indifference within the Tangipahoa Parish Jail. It mentioned a 2014 lawsuit accusing an officer of standing by while an inmate was raped in the shower. That inmate claimed that he tried to get a deputy's attention by banging on a cell window but was told to "sit down and shut up."⁸⁰

Sheriff Edwards has complained about the conditions of the jail, stating that it’s “antiquated layout makes it hard to monitor, and it's too small to allow for the proper segregation of different types of prisoners.”⁸¹

⁷⁰ https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/article_57fbbce1-e88d-5583-898b-c56ed549dde3.html;
https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/courts/article_848f061e-12c5-11e9-ad9d-87cb52241c31.html

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/courts/article_51d6aa30-4c7c-11e7-aba6-c373cc7d742a.html

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.*