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Law and Incarceration

Assignment # 3- Better Kow Your Jail

Vermillion Parish City Jail

I. Jail Characteristics

Vermillion Parish City Jail is located within Vermillion Parish of Abbeville, Louisiana. The Sheriff of Vermillion Parish is Michael Couvillion. In Vermillion, the Sheriff is the chief law enforcement in the parish, and he administers the parish jail system although technically, jail wardens are in charge of the jail. As provided by Article V, Section 27 of Louisiana Constitution of 1974, the Sheriff serves a four-year term as the chief executive officer of the law enforcement district and ex-officio tax collector of the parish. Sheriff Couvillion has been in office since 2004. The jail in Vermillion Parish is governed by two deputies: Warden, Kirk Frith, and Assistant Warden, Major Troy Hebert. There has only been one death in custody within the last five years in the Vermillion Parish City Jail. The in custody death occurred in the year 2015. The Jail houses both male and female inmates. Between years 2014-2019, the male inmate population has been no less than 134 inmates and no greater than 142 inmates. Alternatively, the female population, dramatically smaller in size, has housed no more than ten female inmates within the last five years, with eight being the least amount of women in custody since 2015.

According to information contained in CJ-9A reports collected by the United States Department of Justice, average daily population of male inmates ranged between 141-149 from years 2014-2019. Further, the average female inmate population ranged from eight female inmates to ten female inmates in the years 201-2019. Please note that the department of Justice stopped collecting CJ-9A in custody data reports in 2019. Consequently, 2019 is the last year of official, and verifiable, DOJ report information on in custody deaths that has been published. The following table reflects data from years 2015-2019 for male and female populations, average daily populations for both, and in custody inmate deaths:

Year	# of Male Inmates In Custody	# of Female Inmates in Custody	Average Daily Population	Number of In Deaths
2015	139	9	149 (M) 9 (F)	1 (M) – D. Harrington-medical (w)(m)
2016	134	8	143.75 (M) 8.95 (F)	0
2017	138	8	142.73 (M) 8.8 (F)	0
2018	142	8	141.28 (M) 8.65 (F)	0
2019	138	10	141.81 (M) 8.75 (F)	0
2020	Data not confirmed	Date not confirmed	Data not confirmed	0- confirmed by Warden (PRA)

I. Number of Deaths Since 2014/ Assistant Warden Interview Excerpts

The most recent report published by the U.S. Department of Justice regarding in custody death data was released this month, in December 2021. The article, “Mortality in State and Federal Prisons, 2001-2019- Statistical Tables”, a total of 3,853 prisoners died in state or private prisons or private prison facilities under state contracts, which was 284 deaths less than the previous year in 2018. Considering this, it’s pretty impressive that Vermillion Parish City Jail has only had one death within the last five years. When interviewed about jail operations and contributing factors to the jail’s astonishingly low death rate, initially Assistant Warden Major Troy Hebert attributed it to “Good luck.” However, after a brief joke from the interviewee that the answer was likely insufficient for her to receive a passing grade for her presentation, Major Hebert stated that he wasn’t quite sure. Excerpts from the interview are as follows:

Student Interviewer (Sierra Spears): *Mr. Hebert, you’ve had great success as it relates to the relatively low amount of in custody deaths that you’ve had. Why do you think that is?*

Major Troy (Assistant Warden of Vernon Parish City Jail): *Good luck, I suppose (laughs).*

SS: *Well, I guess you most certainly can't discount that, but I think my professor wouldn't like that response (chuckle). Is there anything more tangible you can think of that has contributed to it?*

Major Troy: *Well, I'm not quite sure. We do know that other parish jails have not been as fortunate as we have been over the years, but I really do think it is good luck Sierra.*

SS: *Hmm...What are the daily operations like at your jail? In other words, do you have any special protocols or monitoring procedures that could have prevented in custody deaths from occurring that you can think of?*

Major Troy: *Well, our protocol is to check inmate cells routinely every thirty minutes. We are big on that with our deputies. It's not always perfect, but we have been pretty consistent with the checks. It is definitely a part of our daily routine. Perhaps that is part of the reason.*

SS: *When guards have disciplinary infractions, is there some type of formal disciplinary process or chain of command that they have to report to?*

Major Troy: *Yes. When the deputies (or guards) do something wrong and they're reported, they're reprimanded by their superior. If they want to appeal any decisions they have to first get an appeal from the warden and then the parish sheriff.*

SS: *Sounds like you all have an enforceable disciplinary hierarchy, which could be one of the reasons your in custody death count has been so low consistently. One more question, do you think the inmates possibly play a part in the results?*

Major Troy: *Well, I do think maybe our inmates are not as depressed as other inmates in other jails. I believe that could have something to do with it. I hear that depression is a big problem in a lotta places, but we may be more fortunate with here with our inmates not being as depressed.*

SS: *Thanks for that observation Major Troy! I didn't consider the mental condition of the inmates, so thanks for offering that alternative perspective!*

II. Information: 2014 In Custody Decedent

Between the years 2014 and 2020, only one inmate died in custody in Vermillion Parish Jail. According to the inmate death report form filled out by Vermillion Parish Jail, Don Harrington was a Caucasian male who died on November 08, 2015 from medical causes in a facility outside of jail and for preexisting conditions that he had before he went to jail. More specifically, the form states that Mr. Harrington had a heart attack. He went into custody on June, 9, 2015, so he was in jail for less than six months at the time of his death. He was about 42 years when he died, as the record indicates that he was born August 18, 1973. Further, Mr. Harrington was not been convicted at when he died. He was held in custody for two counts for two counts of public intimidation, two counts of threatening a public official, theft of goods and simple assault.

III. Evidence of Transparency

Transparency is evidenced by the CJ-9A Department Justice Reports filed with the United States Department of Justice, interview and correspondence from Assistant Warden of Vermillion Parish Jail, Major Troy Hebert, and the consistency reflected in collected data. Since the jail has such a good record, Major Troy was very open to communicating regarding the data and jail information.

IV. Notable Cases or Complaints on Prison/Jail Conditions in the Last 5 Years

After review of archives, the last time a major article was written about the jail was in July of 2020 due to a mass outbreak of coronavirus on one of the housing units. 39 inmates were reported to have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, but were either asymptomatic or displayed minor symptoms. The entire dormitory housing was quarantined and a new policy was created, requiring new inmates to be quarantined for fourteen days before being able to enter the jail, to prevent further outbreaks and contain the situation. It seems that Vermillion is a small town that has the same sheriff in office since 2004, so there was not much in the press about it.

Source Links:

Vermillion Parish Sheriff's Office: <https://vpso.net>

United States Census Bureau (Abbeville QuickFacts):

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/abbevillecitylouisiana/PST040219>

Louisiana Legislative Auditor (Vermillion Parish Sheriff Audited Financial Statements for fiscal years ended June 30, 2015-2020)(Audited by Kolder, Slaven & Company):

2020-

[https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/77e168a2a2575f0f862586550056c4c5/\\$file/00022406.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/77e168a2a2575f0f862586550056c4c5/$file/00022406.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

2019-

[https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/e4ab7e822341c618862584ce0056972a/\\$file/0001eb4d.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/e4ab7e822341c618862584ce0056972a/$file/0001eb4d.pdf?openelement&.7773098)

2018-

[https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/A07FB7420711DAA58625836F005DB296/\\$FILE/0001B29C.pdf](https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/A07FB7420711DAA58625836F005DB296/$FILE/0001B29C.pdf)

2017-

[https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/46A1FF9B606863C6862581FC0062D6F6/\\$FILE/00016E24.pdf](https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/46A1FF9B606863C6862581FC0062D6F6/$FILE/00016E24.pdf)

2016-

[https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/DC37B8819FB5CCB9862580CE005C99F8/\\$FILE/00012659.pdf](https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/DC37B8819FB5CCB9862580CE005C99F8/$FILE/00012659.pdf)

2015-

[https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/AE6B42ADE94523FB86257F53006FD540/\\$FILE/0000C9A0.pdf](https://www.lla.la.gov/PublicReports.nsf/AE6B42ADE94523FB86257F53006FD540/$FILE/0000C9A0.pdf)

Local Inmate Death Report: <https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Harrington-Don-Vermillion-2015-CJ9.pdf>

Last Headline Story by the Acadiana Advocate:

https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/coronavirus/article_e9df5134-d107-11ea-aa05-13f9cc2ed314.html