

DETENTION IN YOUR DISTRICT

STATE: Louisiana

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 5

FACILITIES: River Correctional Center, Richwood Correctional Center, Winn Parish Correctional Center, Catahoula Correctional Center, Jackson Parish Correctional Center, LaSalle Correctional Center (Olla), LaSalle ICE Processing Center (Jena), Alexandria Staging Facility

CAPACITY: 7,300 (approx.)

Overview & Planned Expansion

Immigrant detention has rapidly expanded Louisiana. Within the past year the state moved from [two centers](#) holding approximately 2,000 immigrants detained to [12 facilities](#) holding more than 8,000 people. As of October 2019, Louisiana is now the state with the second highest level of immigrant incarceration in the country. In an October 2019 [press statement](#), ICE spokesperson Bryan Cox said that detention expansion in Louisiana is directly tied to an influx of migrants at the southern border. However, advocates express concern with underlying profit motives and lack of transparency as it relates to expansion. In addition, a former New Orleans Field Office Director who facilitated this expansion recently became employed as a [top official](#) at LaSalle private prison corporation raising questions about potential corruption in contracting and motive

Due Process Concerns All Across ICE Facilities in Louisiana

Individuals detained in ICE facilities in Louisiana, including asylum seekers, face significant barriers to release on bond and parole or receiving approvals to asylum claims. In the final year of the Obama administration, ICE's New Orleans' Field Office [released](#) 76% of asylum seekers on parole. In 2018, this number had dropped to 1.5%, and is near zero for 2019. In [September 2019](#), a federal judge filed a preliminary injunction ordering ICE's New Orleans field office to resume offering individualized parole hearings for asylum seekers. However, activists and legal services providers report that ICE continues to issue blanket parole denials. Louisiana also has among the highest [refusal rates](#) for release on bond in the country. According to 2018 data obtained by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (Trac) at Syracuse University, Louisiana's immigration courts deny 61% of requests for release on bond, in comparison to the national average denial rate of 52%. Also according to data analyzed by Trac, the median reported [bond rate](#) in Louisiana for the month of September 2019 was \$10,000. Immigrants unable to pay high bond amounts must remain in detention. Louisiana courts also have a high denial rate for asylum claims. Immigrants whose cases are heard by judges in Louisiana must go through immigration courts in Oakdale or Jena. According to data obtained by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse ([TRAC](#)) at Syracuse University, in 2018, the two judges presiding in Oakdale, Judge Agnelis L. Reese and Judge John A. Duck Jr had 100% and 83.8% [denial rates](#). According to legal services providers, some immigrants detained in Louisiana also have their cases heard via VTC in courts in New York, including courts at Batavia and Varick street, which, as of December 2018, had denial rates of 82.5% and 74.9%, respectively. Legal services providers and advocates express [concern](#) at the lack of legal resources and remoteness of all ICE facilities in Louisiana.

Resources

- [ACLU Louisiana](#)
- [Louisiana Advocates for immigrants in detention](#)
- [Southern Poverty Law Center South East Freedom Initiative](#)
- [Catholic Charities at Baton Rouge](#)
- [Loyola University College of Law - Loyola Law Clinic & Center For Social Justice Immigrant Services and Legal Advocacy](#)
- [VOCES Unidas Louisiana Immigrant Rights Coalition](#)

Key Areas of Concern

- Retaliatory and inappropriate use of solitary confinement; Medical Neglect;
- Abuse of LGBT population;
- Lack of transparency in contracting.

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River Correctional Center

The River Correctional Center (River) is located in Ferriday, Concordia Parish. According to May 2019 [press reports](#), the Concordia Sheriff's Office entered into an Intergovernmental Services Agreement (IGSA) with ICE for the purposes of detaining immigrants in early 2019.

The facility is owned and operated by private prison company [LaSalle Corrections](#). Health [services](#) are provided by a combination of employees from the Concordia Sheriff's Office and LaSalle Corrections; food services are operated by sheriff's department employees; and phone services are provided via the Correct Services Group. As of May 2019, the facility held [510](#) detained immigrants. According to the previously referenced press report, these individuals are primarily nationals of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador and many of those currently detained in River were transferred from other ICE facilities in California, Texas, and Arizona. According to LaSalle Correctional's website, the facility has a [total capacity](#) of 602.

Data on the exact per diem rate paid by ICE to River is not publicly available. However, according to October 2019 [press reports](#), ICE sets the average per diem rate for facilities in Louisiana at \$65. Although this is less than ICE's national average per diem rate of \$126, it is significantly greater than the average per diem rate paid to Louisiana sheriff's departments to house individuals serving criminal sentences,, creating a financial incentive to detain immigrants. According to April 2019 [press reports](#), the state per diem rate to house individuals serving criminal sentences ranges from \$10.25 to \$24.39.

Beginning in spring 2019, asylum seekers detained at River have initiated at least two hunger strikes, largely in response to expressed human rights violations and prolonged periods of detention due to high rates of bond and parole denials. ICE estimated total number of participants in a [March 2019](#) hunger strike at 24, although activists put the number at over [150](#).



Credit: US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE)

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Richwood Correctional Center

The Richwood Correctional Center (RCC) is located in Monroe, Ouachita Parish. According to ICE's [list](#) of "Over 72 Hour Facilities," the facility operates via an IGSA. The facility, [owned and operated](#) by LaSalle Corrections, began detaining immigrants in 2019. According to a September 2019 [press report](#), ICE pays RCC a per diem rate of \$64.07, and RCC then pays the town of Richwood a per diem rate of \$1.50. According to the same press report, the facility can house up to 1,100 immigrants and has a total capacity of 1,129. The facility detains both immigrants and individuals held on criminal charges. Prior to the commencement of its IGSA with ICE, Richwood detained primarily individuals facing criminal charges or serving criminal sentences. RCC staff have faced numerous allegations of abuse toward individuals held in criminal custody.



Credit: US Immigration and Customs Enforcement

In [September 2019](#), Christopher Loring, a former lieutenant at RCC, was sentenced to 46 months in prison for conspiring to cover up abuse of prisoners by correctional officers, including spraying chemical agents directly into the faces of detained individuals while they were handcuffed. Family members of two individuals who died in custody at Richwood filed [wrongful death](#) lawsuits against LaSalle. According to press reports and testimony by the family members of detained individuals, in October 2015, officials at Richwood failed to intervene to stop an hours-long physical assault involving two persons. When officials finally responded, they used extreme force against the alleged instigator of the assault and failed to seek prompt medical care for injuries. These actions ultimately resulted in the deaths of Vernon White and Erie Moore. Since Richwood began detaining immigrants for ICE, there have been deaths in custody and reports that solitary confinement is used ubiquitously for prolonged periods of time, and as a means of retaliation. In [October 2019](#), Roylan Hernandez-Diaz, an asylum seeker from Cuba, died of apparent suicide while in solitary confinement in Richwood. Prior to his death, Hernandez-Diaz had been denied release on parole several times, and was placed in solitary confinement after he participated in a hunger strike in protest of his prolonged detention. In [press statements](#), Yarelis Gutierrez Barros, Mr. Hernandez-Diaz's fiancée, stated she does not think Mr. Hernandez-Diaz committed suicide.

In statements to Louisiana Advocates for Individuals in Detention volunteers and [Freedom for Immigrants](#) staff, individuals detained at Richwood and their family members reported that 40 men engaged in a hunger strike to protest the death of Hernandez-Diaz, as well as their conditions and lack of release. According to first-hand accounts, officials at Richwood used excessive force include physical violence leading to hospitalization to disrupt the hunger strike. Individuals detained at Richwood have also reported widespread medical neglect. Detained individuals have reported pervasive and unmet medical needs in statements to Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention volunteers. In an [October 2019](#) press statement, a lawyer for a detained asylum seeker from Venezuela with hyper-tension and diabetes reported that their client's health has deteriorated as a result of poor quality food and that their client is being denied appropriate medical care

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Winn Parish Correctional Center

Winn Parish Correctional Center operates via an IGSA between Winn Parish and ICE. According to an [October 2019](#) press report, the five year IGSA began in May 2019, with a potential five year extension. The same report states the facility houses 1,500 people. According to a [September 2019](#) press report, over 1,000 individuals are currently held there. According to the same report, the Parish receives a per diem rate of \$70 per individual, and staff working at the facility say a pay increase from \$10 an hour to \$18.44 an hour after the contract with ICE was initiated.

In an [October 2019](#) press statement, Giron Martinez, an asylum seeker from Honduras, stated that he was forced to remove the remnants of a rotten tooth on his own, without anesthetic, after being denied dental care for three months. Martinez also reported that he was repeatedly denied parole despite having no criminal history, not posing a flight risk, and having a U.S. citizen willing to sponsor him.

In [December 2019](#), ICE officials disrupted a protest waged by detained individuals with pepper spray. Although an ICE spokesman characterized the use of pepper spray as “brief” and “calculated,” family members of individuals detained at Winn and attorneys reported to Telemundo excessive use of force, resulting in the hospitalization of at least one person.

Jackson Parish Correctional Center

The Jackson Parish Correctional Center is located in Jonesboro, Jackson Parish. According to ICE’s list of “Over 72 Hour Facilities,” Jackson operates via an IGSA. The facility is operated by private prison company LaSalle Corrections. According to a [press report](#), the contract began in March 2019, with a per diem rate of \$64.07. In a [press statement](#), Jackson Parish Sheriff Andy Brown stated that the Jackson Parish allows ICE to detain up to 1,000 immigrants at the jail. According to the LaSalle Corrections [website](#), the facility has a total capacity of 1,252.

Legal services providers express concern with the remoteness of the facility. In an October 2019 [press statement](#), attorney David Rozas said that people detained at Jackson must appear via video conference before a judge in Oakdale, Louisiana, for their initial hearing. Oakdale is a two-hour’s drive from Jackson, causing significant delays in proceedings. Rozas said that if he needs to file something during the preliminary virtual hearing, he must drive to Oakdale to do so.

In a previously referenced [October 2019](#) press report, detained Hondurann asylum seeker Giro Martinez stated that, while detained at Jackson, he was housed in an over-crowded room, without air conditioning, and with only three shower stalls available per 140 men, resulting in unsanitary conditions and a pervasive stench. Martinez also reported that he was only allowed outdoor recreation for 30 minutes, once a week.



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Catahoula Correctional Center

The Catahoula Correctional Center is located in Harrisonburg, Catahoula Parish. According to a press report, ICE began using the facility to detain immigrants in [May 2019](#). It is operated by private prison company LaSalle Corrections. According to LaSalle's [website](#), the facility has a total capacity of 835, although it is unclear how much of this capacity used to detain immigrants, and how many are used to detain individuals serving criminal sentences. As of November 2019, the facility does not appear on ICE's "[Detention Facility Locator](#)."

In July 2019, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren sent a [letter](#) to then-Acting Director of ICE Mark Morgan expressing concern that ICE had begun detaining immigrants at Catahoula and two other facilities - Adams County Correctional Center in Mississippi and South Louisiana ICE Processing Center - without providing proper notice. The letter also requested detailed information about the contracting mechanisms for each facility.



Credit: LaSalle Corrections

LaSalle Correctional Center

The LaSalle Correctional Center in Olla, LaSalle Parish is operated by LaSalle Corrections. According to LaSalle's website, the facility has a total capacity of 755. However, according to an August 2019 [press statement](#) by ICE spokesperson Bryan Cox, 100 immigrants are detained there. Cox also said that ICE began detaining immigrants at LaSalle Correctional in August 2019. As of November 2019, the facility does not appear on ICE's Facility Locator and the facility's contract is not publicly available.



Credit: US Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Alexandria Staging Facility

ICE operates a staging facility in Alexandria. A staging facility is a holding area where ICE is allowed to temporarily house detained immigrants for up to 12-16 hours. According to a 2018 Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) [audit](#) conducted by private company Creative Corrections, LLC, the facility opened in 2014 via a modification of the 2013 IGSA between ICE, the LaSalle Economic Development District, and Geo Group. Geo Group now operates both the Alexandria staging facility and the ICE Processing Center in Jena.

According to the audit, the facility has a maximum capacity of 400, and only men are detained there, although women may be briefly detained in the facility before boarding a deportation flight if no men are present. Also according to the audit, the average daily population is 251, with an average length of stay of two days. The facility is located near the Alexandria International Airport, which is used by ICE to stage deportation flights by ICE air. According to a [press report](#), 29,000 people were deported on 500 flights out of Alexandria during the course of 2017. According to [data](#) obtained by TRAC 37% of detained people held at Alexandria between October 2014 - November 2015 were being held there to facilitate transfers between ICE facilities. Also according to TRAC [12,042 people](#) were deported from Alexandria during the same period.



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LaSalle Processing Center

The LaSalle ICE Processing Center is located in Jena, Louisiana and operates via a IGSA between ICE and the LaSalle Economic Development District, originally entered into force in [2007](#). The facility is operated by the Geo Group. According to the terms of the original IGSA, the facility's total capacity is 1,160 people and the per diem rate is \$75 for the first 416 people detained at the facility and \$45 for all additional detained persons. The facility houses men and women.

A [June 2019](#) report by the DHS OIG documented numerous deficiencies with food services at the facility, including expired break and improperly packaged food. A [2013 inspection](#) by ICE Office of Detention Oversight (ODO), identified five deficiencies related to medical care, suicide prevention and intervention, and the facility's management of the grievance system.

People detained in LaSalle report widespread, retaliatory use of solitary confinement. According to an [August 2019](#) report by the Project on Government Oversight, 244 persons were placed in solitary confinement at LaSalle between January 1, 2016 and May 4, 2018. Of these, 19 were held in solitary confinement for 75 days or more. In addition, 9% of persons held in solitary confinement in LaSalle have a known mental health illness.

In [October 2018](#), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of persons detained at LaSalle and two other ICE facilities in Irwin, Georgia and Lumpkin, Georgia. The complaint alleged systemic and widespread barriers to access to counsel, noting that only six out of every 100 persons detained at the facility have access to counsel. According to the complaint: LaSalle had only one room available for attorney-client meetings. The dearth of available rooms means that attorneys are frequently forced to wait for hours before meeting with their clients or conduct their meetings in public areas, such as the cafeteria or visitation room. The complaint also stated that legal services providers are restricted to "no contact" visits and must conduct their business through partitions, impeding communication. The SPLC also reports that individuals in solitary confinement or segregated housing face additional barriers to counsel. According to facility regulations, individuals held in segregation cannot speak with attorneys in the public visitation room if anyone else is present or in an adjacent room, and only certain staff are cleared to escort individuals held in segregation. Finally, the complaint states that LaSalle staff do not permit lawyers to bring in electronic equipment, including phones and computers, during visits and consultations. In the absence of interpreters, attorneys are often reliant on online translation tools to communicate with their clients. The complaint noted particular difficulty finding interpreters to speak languages other than English and Spanish.

In [April 2017](#), Freedom for Immigrants named LaSalle in a complaint regarding sexual harassment in ICE detention facilities submitted to DHS' Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL). In preparing the complaint, Freedom for Immigrants examined data obtained via FOIA requests regarding 1,068 reports of sexual abuse within immigration custody facilities between December 2010 and April 2017. According to Freedom for Immigrant's analysis, the highest number of calls to the ICE Enforcement and Removal Office (ERO) Detention Reporting and Information Line (DRIL) between October 2012 and March 2016 related to sexual and/or physical abuse incidents in the country came from the LaSalle Detention Facility. In [statements](#) to Freedom for Immigrants, individuals detained at LaSalle report that women held at LaSalle initiated a hunger strike in October 2019. In November 2019, five South Asian asylum seekers began a [hunger strike](#) in protest of their indefinite detention. A number were subjected to force-feeding and forced-hydration. One was deported in January 2019, without any proper medical attention from ICE, when he was over 80 days into a hunger strike. Another was ultimately released to a sponsor in the United States. One remains in detention, where he is continuing to be force-fed. Two have voluntarily begun the process of drinking a re-hydration fluid known as "Boost."



Credit: US Immigration and Customs Enforcement