

More than 200 inmates in Louisiana prison system held beyond scheduled release date each month

Cordell Gascoigne
14 December 2022

The Louisiana state prison system holds more than 200 inmates beyond their release date each month, according to internal state corrections data reviewed by the *New York Times*. It also shows that in 2019, the average additional sentence time was approximately 44 days. Lengthy sentences and delayed releases are endemic in Louisiana, costing the state \$2.8 million a year in housing costs alone.

The case of Johnny Traweek is but one of many inmates who fell victim to the barbaric Louisiana prison system. Traweek was informed of the possibility of being released by a judge after serving seven months in prison for assaulting someone with an instrument while intoxicated. Despite having a release date of May 2, 2018, he was forced to wait another 19 days until the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSC) finished processing his paperwork.

As release date approached Traweek gave away his personal items to other inmates, such as blankets and food. Instead of leaving prison he was left in limbo, no longer serving time for his conviction but still behind bars. Interviewed by the *New York Times*, Traweek said, “It’s a bad, bad feeling. Every day, I’m getting up and thinking I’m going to get out. And it doesn’t happen. I knew I wasn’t in there for any charge, and still, I have to sit there.”

In a similar case in December 2020, a federal judge ruled the DPSC guilty of “false imprisonment” of Brian McNeal, who was ordered to prison for 90 days—with a set release date—after violating his probation. McNeal was held 41 days after his release date.

“Mr. McNeal is one of the thousands of Louisiana people held each year past their release date. Hopefully, this decision will show the Louisiana Department of

Corrections that what they are doing is illegal and has consequences,” said McNeal’s attorney.

Due to the consistent miscarriage of justice and violation of constitutional rights, the Justice Department has opened an investigation into Louisiana’s release practices. Reports show that the investigation is expected to find myriad violations of federal law.

Louisiana is home to one of the most overcrowded prison systems in the US. According to a 2019 report by the Justice Department, the state has 111 jails in 64 parishes. On any given day more than 50,000 people are behind bars in state prisons, private prisons or local jails. Louisiana’s community corrections population was 33,741 under probation and 28,283 under parole. Moreover, the state-operated facilities had a staff of 4,800 employees and a budget of nearly \$735 million.

“Since 1970, the total jail population has increased 665 [percent]. In 2015, pretrial detainees constituted 47 [percent] of the total jail population in Louisiana,” according to the Vera Institute of Justice. PrisonPolicy.org reports incarceration rates in the state are 1,094 per 100,000, with the United States at 664, followed by NATO states United Kingdom (129), Portugal (111), Canada (104), France and Belgium (93), Italy (89) down to Norway and Iceland at 54 and 33 respectively.

Inmates are among the most brutalized and mistreated in American society from starvation and beatings to conspiracies among officers and the unimpeded spread COVID-19.

Those housed in prisons are viewed as economically viable and worth holding onto as free labor. Reminiscent of the days of chattel slavery, Caddo

Parish Sheriff Steve Prator remarked in 2017, “They’re releasing some good ones that we use every day to wash cars, to change oil in our cars, to cook in the kitchen, to do all that, where we save money.”

In 2021, the racial make-up of Louisiana was reported as 31.2 percent African American, 57.9 percent as Caucasian, and 6.7 percent as two or more races, according to Statista; and according to the Vera Institute, African Americans constitute 52 percent of people in jail and 67 percent of people in prison.

Such disparities are seized upon by the pseudo-left and the Democratic Party to foment disorientation and division among broad sections of workers through identity politics. However, the reality is that prisoners, regardless of their race, are overwhelmingly poor and come from the working class, which is the ultimate target of the carceral system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact