



Phelps: Some facts...

Since the race for the office of Sheriff began, there has been much talk, speculation, and even some very interesting rumors concerning the Work Release facility (formerly known as the Phelps Correctional Center) and its potential uses for the parish. I would like to clarify some misconceptions or misunderstandings concerning the Work Release program in hopes of providing the people of the parish with some factual information about how it works and how it serves the parish.

The Work Release Center is located just north of DeQuincy, at the former Phelps Correctional Center. It was built in the 1950's and was utilized as a state prison until it was closed on November 1st, 2012. At the time of its closure, Phelps was the second oldest state prison in Louisiana, only behind Angola State Prison.

In January of 2015, Sheriff Moses, the Louisiana Department of Corrections and Louisiana Workforce re-opened the facility as a work release center. Until recently, the center housed approximately 400 work release inmates. These inmates have been employed by many businesses and companies in Beauregard and Calcasieu parishes. Presently, there are approximately seventy-two employers utilizing work release inmates from the facility.

Earlier this year (2019), the Louisiana Department of Corrections contacted Sheriff Moses concerning expanding the mission of the Work Release Center to not only include work release inmates, but to also locate the regional Re-Entry Program at the facility. This agreement pushed the number of inmates being housed at the facility from 400, to potentially up to 900 within the next few months. As of November 4th, the population was expected to be in excess of 700 inmates by the following week, with 800 inmates expected to be at the facility very soon.

A recent comment was made concerning the timing of the contract re-negotiation to increase the number of inmates to be housed at the Work Release Center. The comment implied that Sheriff Moses sought out the Department of Corrections to increase the number of inmates only after my opponent began speaking about utilizing a portion of the Work Release Center to house parish inmates. As Sheriff Moses stated recently, nothing could be further from the truth. The Department of Corrections contacted him in regard to moving the Re-Entry Program to the Work Release Center...not the other way around. To imply that Sheriff Moses did anything to help one candidate over another is both insulting and absurd.

The Re-Entry program consists of a three-month program designed to assist inmates as they prepare to re-enter society. It provides them training involving life skills, as well as many other areas needed to function in society after they are released. The Work Release Center has an obligation to the Department of Corrections to process 600 inmates a year through the Re-Entry Program. There are

several opportunities for the inmates to train for life outside the prison system. There is a welding program to teach them a trade. They can pursue a G.E.D., and receive substance abuse counselling.

These inmates also have opportunities to work in the facility, but they have not been certified as Work Release inmates. Some may eventually become certified as Work Release eligible, but not all will.

Prior to closure, Phelps operated the largest garment factory in the entire Louisiana Prison System. Recently, the Department of Corrections has indicated that they are interested in re-opening the garment factory at the Work Release Center. Prior to closing, approximately \$2,000,000 (2 million) dollars of clothing was produced at the facility. This clothing was utilized by all State Prisons and many parish facilities as well. This will be yet another opportunity for approximately 120 inmates (who do not qualify as work release inmates) to work while in the facility.

The Work Release Center has a unique goal and that is to provide services, training, and employment to Louisiana Department of Corrections inmates. These are not parish prisoners. There are different classifications of inmates within this state, including pre-trial detainees (meaning an inmate that is in jail pending trial), sentenced inmates (these can be misdemeanors and/or felonies) and in some cases, material witnesses. A parish jail may have all of these classifications within its population, but a state-owned facility does not. A state prison houses inmates that have all been convicted of a felony. I believe that the idea of potentially mixing these different classes of inmates is not a wise idea for many reasons, not the least of which is liability. I would never expose the Sheriff's Office to the potential liability in the event something should happen at the facility while trying to mix the populations of the Sheriff's Office and the Work Release Center.

In talking about the physical layout of the Work Release Center and the challenges we would face in trying to place parish inmates there, they are many. Currently, the Work Release Center is set up to hold a maximum of 912 inmates. As we discussed earlier, we are expecting to reach 800 DOC inmates in the very near future. Simply stated, there is no room to house any parish inmates. Every housing unit is currently set up to house DOC inmates and every housing unit is occupied.

Going back to classifications, the Work Release Center is currently housing minimum security inmates. The Beauregard Parish Jail is considered a maximum security facility and we house some maximum security inmates. The Work Release Center is not currently designed to house those types of inmates.

Theoretically, if there was a way to set up a section of the Work Release Center to house parish inmates, there are some other problems with the way the facility is designed. There is only one laundry facility and one kitchen area. This would inevitably lead to mixing of the parish inmates with the Department of Corrections inmates.

Also, all of the dorms presently in use at the Work Release Center are dorm style units. That means that the inmates are housed in one open housing unit with no individual cells. There is one Disciplinary Dorm with individual cells, but it is not available for use by parish inmates due to the Work Release Center utilizing that dorm for their own disciplinary needs. Again, the facility is simply not suited to house parish prisoners.

Let's discuss the financial realities of what the Work Release Center means to Beauregard Parish. On average, it costs the Louisiana Department of Corrections approximately \$50.00 a day to house an

inmate in the state prison system. By utilizing Work Release facilities around the state, DOC is saving the State of Louisiana a significant amount of money. For example, housing a Work Release inmate in a

Work Release facility costs the State approximately \$11.00 per day (a savings of approximately \$39.00 per day). Housing a Re-Entry inmate at the Work Release Center costs the State approximately \$24.39 a day (a savings of almost \$26.00 per day). With that in mind, one can see why the State would prefer to place as many State inmates in a Work Release Center as possible, making the option of the Sheriff placing parish inmates within the facility unlikely.

Another problem to an idea that has been repeated often involves the logistics of attempting to place parish inmates in the Work Release Center. The Sheriff's Office Transportation Division has a tremendous responsibility in getting inmates to and from many different locations during the course of the day. Inmates are transported daily to Court, doctor's offices, other facilities, etc. Having those inmates located over thirty miles from DeRidder will be an enormous challenge and will require the Sheriff's Office to spend a huge amount of the budget on more deputies to work at the facility to guard, care for, and transport inmates housed there. That will also mean more vehicles and many other expenses related to the idea. Basically, the Sheriff's Office would be responsible for two separate facilities. I do not believe that it would be a wise expenditure of the tax payers money to attempt this.

A popular misconception that has been repeated often in regards to our Work Release Center is that the Department of Corrections pays Louisiana Workforce for housing the inmates, and in turn, Louisiana Workforce then pays the Sheriff's Office. This is incorrect. The Department of Corrections pays the Sheriff's Office, who in turn, then pays Louisiana Workforce.

The financial benefit to the Beauregard Parish Sheriff's Office, and the people of Beauregard Parish, is not hard to explain. When the contract was for 400 inmates, the return to the Sheriff's Office was approximately \$500,000.00 per year. With the new contract, the potential income for the Sheriff's Office could exceed \$1,000,000.00 (1 million) per year. With that income, it will allow the Sheriff's Office to continue to grow the services that it offers, provide new programs, and potentially put more deputies on the road. This is a program that is so beneficial to the Beauregard Parish Sheriff's Office, the residents of the parish, the inmates participating, and the State of Louisiana.

In closing, I realize the need for solutions to our jail population issue. I am very interested in working with the Police Jury, and possibly other agencies to reduce the costs of housing our inmates, and I feel very confident that we can accomplish that.

With that being said, as I have explained, the idea of using the Work Release Center is not the answer. If one was not aware of the realities, I can see how it would be tempting to put that idea out. But the truth is, there are many more reasons why this idea will not work.

