



PATRICK "PAT" LABAT
FULTON COUNTY SHERIFF

FULTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

185 CENTRAL AVENUE, S. W. 9TH FLOOR
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 13, 2023

Contact Information: Natalie L. Ammons, Director of Communications
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Statement from Sheriff Patrick "Pat" Labat Concerning Launch of U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Investigation

Atlanta, GA – I want to thank the Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division for our meeting today. As I shared with DOJ officials, we welcome this investigation and are prepared to cooperate fully.

The humanitarian crisis at the Fulton County Rice Street Jail is not new. Recognizing the systemic concerns that have plagued the Fulton County Jail for decades, I contacted DOJ's National Institute of Corrections (NIC) in September of 2022 making an urgent request for a security audit, technical assistance and support surrounding the circumstances at the jail.

As recently as 10 days ago, we had an in-person conferral with NIC's Executive Leadership Team and, together, instituted a strategy and course of action that will include dispatching national experts. NIC has committed to make a full operational, programmatic and architectural assessment to address and mitigate these critical issues within the next 30 days. They have also committed to working with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to maximize and leverage all the resources of both DOJ agencies to support the Fulton County Sheriff's Office.

I have publicly, privately, and repeatedly raised concerns about the dangerous overcrowding, dilapidated infrastructure and critical staffing shortages at the jail. The best possible outcome of the report from the Department of Justice is that it will confirm the findings of the Jail Feasibility Study completed in March of 2023 – that the Rice Street Jail is not viable and a replacement jail is needed. In addition, solutions will be identified and implemented with the support of the Board of Commissioners that guarantee humane care and detention of inmates and provide safety assurances for all who live and work in our facilities.

Despite the difficult circumstances, we will continue to work collaboratively with our partners to ensure the health and safety of all the women and men remanded to our care.

Sheriff Patrick "Pat" Labat

ABOUT THE FULTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE: The mission of the Fulton County Sheriff's Office is Service; through laser-focused efforts to protect the citizens of Fulton County with coordinated law enforcement operations, special strategic teams, and community outreach methods. The Sheriff's Office is constitutionally responsible for the security of all courtrooms, executing arrest warrants, and serving civil papers. In addition, the Sheriff's Office is responsible for the administration and operation of the Fulton County Jail.

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September 20, 2022

Acting Director, Shaina Vanek
National Institute of Corrections
320 First Street N.W.
Rm. 901D – 3rd Floor
Washington, D.C. 20534
(VIA Email)

Re: Urgent Request for Security Audit, Technical Assistance and Support

Dear Director Vanek:

As the Sheriff of Fulton County, Georgia, who is charged with the safekeeping of inmates in the county jail,¹ I am formally requesting a security audit, technical assistance, and your support in light of a number of potentially dangerous circumstances, to include jail crowding; inmate attacks on both inmates and custody staff; alleged criminal activity by, and arrest of, employees and contractors; and in-custody deaths of a number of inmates at the Fulton County Jail (FCJ).

The FCJ exceeded capacity from the time it was built. Specially, the FCJ operational capacity is 2,652. As a result of court backlogs, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a dramatic rise in crime, however, the current average daily jail population is approximately 3,600 inmates. These conditions require FCJ staff to house more nearly 530 inmates on portable sleeping devices, which are located in common areas. Because the inmates are housed in common areas, they cannot be secured behind locked doors. This condition creates a significant safety risk for both detainees and staff. Overcrowding at the FCJ has reached a critical point.

Equally challenging is the rapid and extensive deterioration of the FCJ's physical plant, which allows inmates to use parts of the building to create weapons and hide contraband. This specific condition has contributed to attacks on FCJ staff and inmates alike. Additionally, dozens of cell doors can be neither fully closed nor locked, thus preventing jail staff from performing a quintessential function of their duties – securing detainees. To highlight this point, in recent months, we have documented the confiscation of at least 1,139 weapons, 25 cellular phones, narcotics, and tobacco. Related, this year, 2 employees and 3 contractors have been arrested

¹ See Official Code of Georgia Annotated § 42-4-1.

for their alleged role in trafficking contraband, and there are, currently underway, 53 investigations related to jail staff and/or vendor misconduct.

It is my duty to secure the FCJ and to protect my staff and those within my custody and care. Current conditions, however, jeopardize the performance of these duties and the safety of the FCJ operations. My request, therefore, is urgent and I ask for your assistance as soon as practicable.

I ask that your review and assistance include, but not be limited to, addressing our policies, procedures, training, and jail operations relating to:

- all aspects of the impact of FCJ physical plant deterioration on jail operations and safety;
- all aspects of the impact of critical overcrowding on detainee, staff and contractor safety; and
- the mental and emotional health and wellness of the inmates and correctional staff.

While I applaud the Fulton County Board of Commissioners for their prudence in commissioning a jail feasibility study, I do not have the luxury of time as it regards the safety of either my employees or those within my custody and care. As we continue our work towards building a new jail, therefore, we welcome your input, guidance, and support in furtherance of my goal of protecting the FCJ and our community.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Patrick "Par" Labat
Fulton County Sheriff

Cc: Robert "Robb" Pitts, Chairman
Liz Hausmann, Vice Chair
Robert Ellis, Commissioner
Lee Morris, Commissioner
Natalie Hall, Commissioner
Marvin S. Arrington, Commissioner
Khadijah Abdur-Rahman, Commissioner
Dick Anderson, Fulton County Manager
J. Terry Norris, Executive Director of The Georgia Sheriffs' Association



US Department of Justice
National Institute of Corrections

Washington, DC 20534

September 27, 2022

Sheriff Patrick Labat
Fulton County Sheriff's Office
185 Central Ave. SW, 9th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Sheriff Labat,

I have received and reviewed your letter dated September 20, 2022, requesting that the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) provide technical assistance (TA) to the Fulton County Sheriff's Office. I have discussed your needs with Acting Director Vanek. I am prepared to dispatch NIC Jails Division staff to Fulton County as soon as possible to secure additional firsthand information and direct observations regarding your needs. The goal of this site visit will be to work with you and your staff on a plan of action to deliver the various and possibly additional modules of technical assistance and training to best address the concerns you have cited in your letter.

The NIC Jails Division TA Manager, Mike Jackson, will contact you in the next few days to discuss possible dates for this proposed initial site visit if this meets with your approval.

I look forward to hearing from you and working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Stephen Amos

Stephen Amos, Chief of the Jails Division
National Institute of Corrections