



August 21, 2013

OPEN LETTER REGARDING LAFOURCHE LIBRARY AND PRISON FUNDING

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Dear Councilmembers:

The Lafourche Parish Council is well aware of the ACLU's concern that any new jail complex be built to accommodate the real needs of the parish. We have met with you and with your jail consultant Michael LeBlanc to express our concerns for proper funding, planning, and construction of a facility that will keep the people of Lafourche safe for years to come. Dr. James Austin, a nationally recognized criminal justice expert whose work reforming the Orleans Parish jail and criminal justice system has saved millions of dollars in jail operating costs, testified before you and offered his services to assess exactly how many jail beds the parish needs and how your system can adopt time-tested reforms to run more effectively at a fraction of the \$20 million cost for a new 600-bed jail.

Robbing the public libraries to fund a jail complex that remains in the planning stages and will have 200 empty beds the day it opens is not in the interests of the people of Lafourche Parish. Public libraries are a backbone of any community, providing educational resources for people of all ages. Any community benefits more from the equalizing benefits of libraries than from excessive spending on a system of criminal justice that locks up people for nonviolent offenses simply because space is available.

This is a serious and important issue. Defunding the libraries will diminish the quality of life for all Lafourche Parish residents for years to come, and once the losses are incurred they cannot easily be made up. In the end, this is about what kind of community Lafourche wants to be: one that provides opportunities for everyone so that they can improve their circumstances, or one that shortchanges the public on opportunity but is quick to penalize for even minor infractions.

Funding bars instead of books does not serve the long-term interest of any community. We urge you to reconsider this ill-advised proposal.

Sincerely,

Marjorie R. Esman

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