

February 2024

**INSIDE
THE
DURHAM COUNTY
JAIL**

perspectives from detained persons



EMANCIPATE

Jail (n.) ('jāl.):

a place under the jurisdiction of a local government for the confinement of persons awaiting trial or those convicted of minor crimes

Durham County Jail houses approximately 400 persons at any given time, according to the Sheriff's Office's Budget Proposal and its approved budget documents.

Durham County Sheriff data show that 75% of the people in the jail are African American, even though only 38% of people in Durham identify as African American.




PERSPECTIVES FROM DETAINED PERSONS

“To be honest, this place is hell.

It is so understaffed, one officer attends to 2 pods at once with 48 detainees in each. The jail is currently packed to capacity and there are days when we don't come out our cells at all to recreate, shower, use phone due to short staff. We receive 3 hours to walk each day according to policy, sometimes we only get 2.”

“We hardly come out on the weekends – and almost never on any Holidays.”



"We eat terrible Aramark meals that I have grown accustomed to – once @ 5:30am, lunch . . . between 10-10:30, then dinner @ about 4pm.

Very light meals which really just keep us alive, so there is at least 12 [hours] where there is no food unless you are fortunate enough to afford the over priced canteen/commissary that arrives on Thursdays."


“During the fall/winter season, cold air was constantly blowing through the vent when [the outside temperatures] were in the 20°-30°F range. I used toilet tissue and soap to block the vent during the night to keep it from blowing on me. Many inmates requested extra blankets, but were denied by facility medical personnel due to it not being a medical need.

There were night where some inmates experienced the shivers from the frigid temperatures in the cell I have heard that they would keep the cold air on as a way to break down the prisoners mental state. This was later confirmed by an officer.”

“Covid breaks out in here regularly, then quarantine makes conditions exceedingly worse.”

“I’ve coughed COVID seven times while in here. Seven. And it’s documented.”

“The air quality . . . is horrible and alone is the cause of most of the . . . outbreaks within the jailing facility. There is visible mildew and perhaps mold around and possibility inside the venting system.”

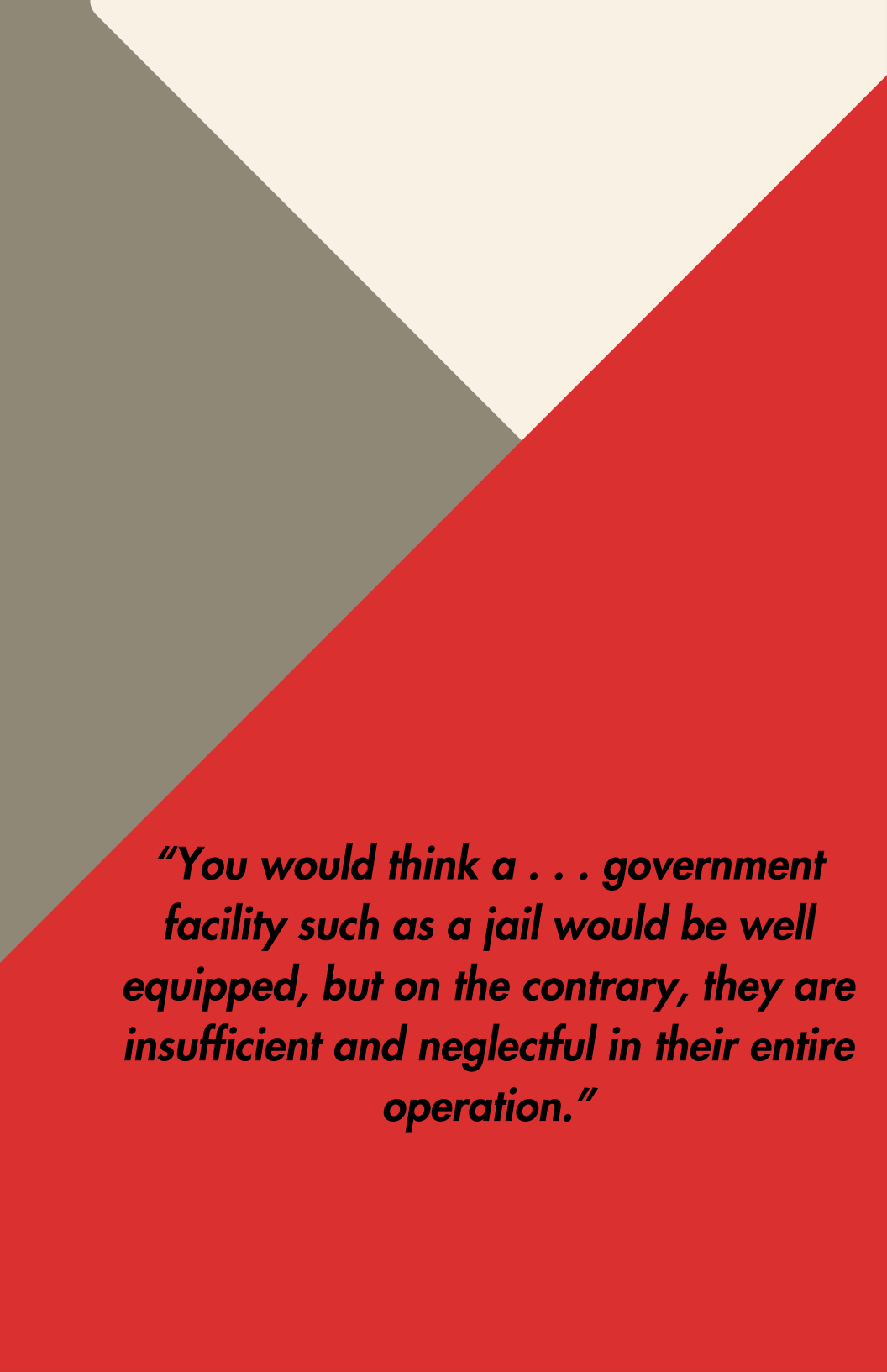


***“Officers walk[] around with
Jackets on—and all we have are
thermals and tee shirts.”***

“The evening I arrived to Durham County Jail, I was just plainly and blankly taken to my cell and door was shut

During those first few days I [] did not have toilet tissue; while being hesitant to ask for anything I would use my wash cloth that was provided with my facility attire to wipe myself.


I was unaware I had to ask for toiletries because it was something I thought that the facility was supposed to provide as a necessity when you arrive to the cell.”



“You would think a . . . government facility such as a jail would be well equipped, but on the contrary, they are insufficient and neglectful in their entire operation.”

“We can’t even receive personal mail anymore (only legal mail) all letters must be rerouted and viewed on a tablet, that is robbing us blind charging us 5¢ a min for anything of interest.”

“They took our in person visits and any pictures that our family sends us we have to pay to look at them. Yes, pay! It’s very depressing.”

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“My life is on hold; I can’t obtain my GED in here. No productive programs at all. Just one and that’s a drug program.”

“There are inmates who have reached out to outside sources . . . but to no avail. . . .

News reporters came to the facility, but were given a false and incorrect narrative of what inmates were experiencing. The chief of this facility went as far as to address to the inmates to stop sending letters because it’s making him look bad. I know of one inmate whose mail was . . . returned to him because he was speaking on truth that the facility chief did not want uncovered.

After that, they put restrictions on his phone calls, tablet suspension, and lost access to the law library. It was if the facility personnel were trying to set an example to scare other inmates if they attempted to do the same.”

“The solitary confinement is the toughest part—you really have to fight to keep from losing your sanity.”



***“The county forces guys to sit in here
for multiple month periods before
finally going to court.”***

“I’ve been incarcerated for 40 months.”

“I feel that the Durham County Jail is using mental tactics to break down a man’s spirit of having any hope of getting out of Jail [T]hey save the state money from going to trial and getting a plea-bargain.”

“What I’ve been told my one of the officer is that the conditions are designed for us to take a plea. We try to be a group of systematic people but its hard being systematic when you get a system that’s filled with discrepancies.”

"Just because we are in here, doesn't mean we don't deserve respect, you know, we are all humans."

“Please forgive me for my handwriting legibility, we don’t have erasers, so I use the bottom of my slipper . . . to correct any errors in my letter.”