Sheriff probing inmate abuse claim

10 deputies are relieved of duty after reports of cuffing, food deprivation

By Brian Day
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Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell announced an investigation Saturday into more than a dozen deputies accused of leaving an inmate handcuffed and depriving him of food for 32 hours following a June 19 arrest.

Ten deputies have been relieved of duty and "a number of others" have been reassigned to other duties pending further investigation, officials from the Sheriff's Information Bureau said in a written statement.

"I expect every member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to perform at the highest standards of professionalism," he said.

"Immediately upon learning of troubling allegations of possible neglect of an inmate at the Inmate Reception Center, my department's executives relieved 10 jail employees of duty, including supervisors," the sheriff said. "The investigation into this incident is ongoing and will be thorough. It will not only focus on employee actions, but also on corrective policies and procedures."

"Allegations included the inmate not being provided food and being handcuffed for a lengthy period of time following a force incident during which the inmate reportedly assaulted a female deputy."

—Sheriff's Department statement

Those relieved of duty include two lieutenants, a sergeant, a senior deputy, four deputies and two custody assistants, officials said.

The alleged misconduct stem from the arrest of an unidentified inmate who was booked at the Inmate Reception Center on June 19.

"Allegations included the inmate not being provided food and being handcuffed for a lengthy period of time following a force incident during which the inmate reportedly assaulted a female deputy," according to the department statement. "The inmate ate upon entry to the jail, but was allegedly restrained for approximately 32 hours; during that time he received medical attention and a cup of water."

The inmate filed a complaint June 27, initiating an investigation, officials said. McDonnell learned of the complaint Thursday and placed the involved deputies on leave or reassignment within 24 hours, officials said.

The Sheriff's Department's Internal Criminal Investigations Bureau and Internal Affairs Bureau are looking into the matter, sheriff's officials said. The Office of the Inspector General and the FBI were also notified of the investigation.

Custody officials at the Inmate Reception Center have been reminded of protocols regarding restraint, checks and feeding of inmates, and additional training was ordered, the sheriff's department statement said. McDonnell said further "corrective action" is pending.

"I am deeply committed to providing the highest levels of constitutional care to those in our charge and will quickly address and remedy any conduct, policies or practices that do not meet this expectation and high standard," McDonnell said.

Sheriff relieves 10 jail workers of duty

Sun 7-12-15
LA Times

An inmate says he was 'restrained' for 32 hours without food and with little water.

By David Zahniser

Ten Los Angeles County Jail employees were relieved of duty pending further investigation following an incident involving an inmate who was allegedly "restrained" for 32 hours, Sheriff Jim McDonnell said Saturday.

McDonnell called the allegations of inmate neglect "troubling" and said he took the actions Friday, a day after he learned of the inmate's complaint.

The incident has been reported to the FBI and various offices charged with oversight of Sheriff's Department misconduct.

The sheriff said he received allegations last week that an inmate booked June 19 at the department's Inmate Reception Center had been handcuffed for a "lengthy period of time" and had not been provided food, according to the sheriff's statement. Those alleged circumstances occurred after the inmate reportedly assaulted a female deputy.

During the time the inmate was restrained, he received medical treatment and a cup of water, according to the statement.

"The investigation into this incident is ongoing and will be thorough," said McDonnell, who came into office on a reform mandate last year in the wake of widespread reports of inmate abuse. "It will not only focus on employee actions, but also on corrective policies and procedures."

Two lieutenants, one sergeant, one senior deputy, four deputies and two custody assistants were relieved of duty pending further investigation. In addition, "a number of others" were reassigned to other duties, the department said.

McDonnell's announcement comes less than a month after three sheriff's deputies were convicted of beating a handcuffed inmate bloody and then lying

[See Sheriff, B6]

[Sheriff, from B1]

to cover up the abuse. That case was the product of a wide-ranging FBI probe in the county's jails.

The sheriff's statement about the latest inmate abuse allegations was released about 7 p.m. Saturday.

Department officials declined requests from The Times for information on the inmate's name, age and reason for being booked at the Inmate Reception Center.

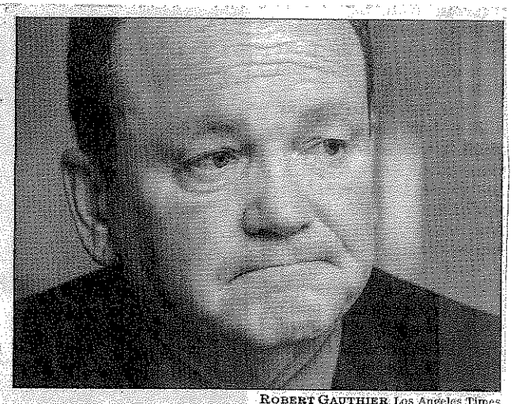
The inmate filed a complaint with the department June 27. According to the department's statement, the inmate ate upon entry to the jail. Department officials notified custody personnel of the protocols regarding the restraint and feeding of inmates.

They also ordered additional training and other "corrective action."

"I am deeply committed to providing the highest levels of constitutional care to those in our charge and will quickly address and remedy any conduct, policies or practices that do not meet this expectation and high standard," McDonnell said in his statement.

The FBI is conducting an investigation of the Sheriff's Department's management of county jails. At least 12 members of the department have been convicted of crimes, including civil rights violations and obstructing the FBI's investigation.

The most recent convictions came last month, as two deputies and their former supervisor were found guilty of violating the civil rights of a man who was beaten and pepper-sprayed while handcuffed at Men's Central Jail. The man, Gabriel Carrillo, had gone to the jail with his girlfriend to visit his brother, who was an inmate there.



Robert Gauthier, Los Angeles Times

SHERIFF Jim McDonnell came into office last year on a reform mandate amid reports of inmate abuse.

A federal jury deliberated for just four hours before delivering its verdicts.

The FBI is investigating a range of jail abuses that allegedly involved those at the highest levels of the department.

In May, former Assistant Sheriff Paul Tanaka was indicted on obstruction charges, along with a captain. Tanaka's lawyer called the charges "baseless" and promised to aggressively defend him in court.

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Times staff writers Richard Winton and Karen Kaplan contributed to this report.

L.A. COUNTY

Daily Breeze
Mon 7-13-15

Jail incident spurs changes

Sheriff enacts procedures for inmates' welfare after allegations one was cuffed, starved for 32 hours

By Brenda Gazzar
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Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell said late Sunday he has ordered changes in the Sheriff's Department after learning that an inmate was allegedly left handcuffed and deprived of food for 32 hours following an arrest last month.

A new around-the-clock team has been created to facilitate movement of inmates to a housing area where they will receive mandatory welfare checks periodically, McDonnell said. The sheriff has also ordered additional training on handcuffing inmates, and officials have been tasked with drafting a training bulletin for distribution that will contain new policies regarding the handcuffing and feeding of inmates as well as procedures for isolation cells, he said.

"The goals are to be able to ensure that people are kept in a safe manner, treated in a humane manner, that they receive appropriate medical care," McDonnell said by phone late Sunday night. "The context

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is you're dealing with people who are dealing with mental illness issues. They oftentimes have to be restrained to protect them and those around them. Trying to get that balance between minimal restraint and safety is always a challenge."

McDonnell said he is "raising the bar high and holding people accountable, looking for the right people with the right moral compass in hiring ... and training, mentoring and supervising our people."

Los Angeles County Supervisors praised McDonnell earlier Sunday for swiftly launching an internal investigation into more than a dozen jail employees accused of leaving an inmate who allegedly had mental health issues handcuffed and depriving him of food for 32 hours following an arrest last month.

McDonnell — who was sworn in last December amid federal allegations of abuse and corruption in the jails — announced the investigation Saturday as 10 staff members, including supervisors, had been relieved of duty and "a number of others" had been reassigned to other duties pending further investigation, according to sheriff's officials.

"At the end of the day it's about accountability," Supervisor Don Knabe said. "(McDonnell) said he's going to do that and this is a good example. From my perspective, at least, I strongly support his efforts to change the culture. ... It's not something that happens overnight."

In earlier days, it may have taken longer to launch such an investigation, but McDonnell has "taken action immediately" to determine whether there were violations and if so, how they can be fixed, he said.

"This is a new day, a new sheriff," Knabe said.

The case of the inmate is reflective of ongoing challenges the department is dealing with in terms of the mentally ill and custody enforcement, McDonnell said. About 10,000 inmates are booked in the Inmate Reception Center each month, he said.

During a portion of the 32 hours in which the inmate was allegedly cuffed and did not receive food, there was an extensive search for a missing gun from a locker outside the security areas, which may have been a factor in the inmate's wait times that day, McDonnell said, adding that it should not be an excuse. end add

McDonnell, who formerly served as police chief of Long Beach, made a decision regarding the employees' status within 24 hours of learning of the inmate's complaint, sheriff's officials said Saturday.

More than a dozen current or former members of the sheriff's department have been convicted of federal charges following the launch of an FBI investigation that dated back at least several years into abuse and corruption at L.A. County jails. Among them were three department employees convicted in June of viciously beating a visitor at a county jail and falsifying reports to cover up the crime. Other cases have yet to head to trial, including that of former Undersheriff Paul Tanaka, who was indicted in May on obstruction of justice charges involving the federal probe.

The sheriff's agency agreed last year to federal court oversight regarding use-of-force issues and to adopt a new policy to settle a class-action lawsuit brought by inmates who said they were beaten by guards.

McDonnell's message is clear in that he's attempting to establish a zero-tolerance policy for abuse, neglect and anything in between, which is needed to turn the department around toward consistent, professional and constitutional law enforcement, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas said.

"This is particularly important in our jails as they are under rather intense scrutiny from the U.S. Department of Justice, and it pertains precisely to the issue of the mentally ill," he said. "Somehow, the message has not gotten across adequately to those responsible for custody enforcement and compliance in the jails so the sheriff simply has to redouble his efforts, and I think that's what he's attempting to do."

The Justice Department found last year that the sheriff's department had still failed to provide sufficient suicide prevention practices to protect prisoners from self-harm and that there were other serious deficiencies in their delivery of mental health care despite a 2002 memorandum of understanding to deal with such issues.

Supervisor Mike Antonovich called the latest allegations "very troubling" and if true, "highly irresponsible" on the part of jail staff.

"I have confidence in the sheriff's commitment to continue the reforms in the jails, including rooting out bad apples and holding all ranks accountable for their actions," Antonovich said by email via a spokesman.

The inmate, who was booked at the Inmate Reception Center on June 19, alleged that he was handcuffed for about 32 hours and not provided food during that time, only medical attention and a cup of water. This allegedly happened "following a force incident during which the inmate reportedly assaulted a female deputy," sheriff's officials said in a statement Saturday. Those relieved of duty in the incident included two lieutenants, a sergeant, a senior deputy, four deputies and a two custody assistants, they said.

McDonnell's actions were "very necessary" and make an important statement about his leadership in light of the "heinous and tragic" allegations involving a human being, said UCLA Professor Jorja Leap, a gang expert.

"I think this is a significant and important first show of leadership by the sheriff," she said. "I also think there needs to be systemic change, and this is an important step in that direction."

Peter Eliasberg of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, said he was pleased to see McDonnell take a proactive approach in apparent contrast to the sheriff's predecessor, Lee Baca. It's not the deputies job to punish an inmate if he in fact did do something wrong, but rather the criminal justice system or the appropriate mechanism within the sheriff's department, he said.

In addition, starving an inmate for 32 hours would be "barbaric treatment," he said. If the latest allegations prove true, some employees in the department's custody division will have to be let go since that would be "a key component to changing the culture in that department," he said.

The sheriff's Internal Criminal Investigations Bureau and Internal Affairs Bureau are looking into the allegations of "possible neglect," officials said. The county's Office of the Inspector General and the FBI were also notified of the investigation.

Staff writer Brian Day and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

For sheriff, quick reaction is only one step

Cleaning up the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department after years of scandal never figured to be a quick or easy task, or to be a one-man job.

So nobody should be too surprised by fresh headlines about alleged abuse of inmates in county jails, including the accusation that jail employees left an inmate — a man suffering from mental-health issues — handcuffed and deprived him of food for about 32 hours following an arrest in June.

Still, even unsurprising news can be shocking to the sensibilities of L.A. residents. If the inmate's claims are true, there is no excuse for such treatment. As hard as jobs of jailhouse deputies and supervisors may be, there is little room for sympathy in a case like this, not after all the lessons they should have learned from everything that has happened in the Sheriff's Department in recent years — including the resignation of former Sheriff Lee Baca, the upcoming trials of former Undersheriff Paul Tanaka and former Captain William Thomas Carey, the convictions of more than a dozen department employees on federal charges, the imposition of federal court oversight of the agency, and the appointment of a civilian oversight commission and inspector general.

This shock should energize stepped-up efforts at reform.

Southern Californians should be encouraged by the initial response by Sheriff Jim McDonnell to the mistreatment of the unidentified inmate.

After the incident was reported, McDonnell swiftly announced Saturday that 10 employees said to be involved — two lieutenants, a sergeant, a senior deputy, four deputies and two custody assistants — had been reassigned to other duties pending further investigation.

McDonnell quickly followed that decision by saying Sunday he had ordered changes in jailhouse procedures to shorten wait times in the Inmate Reception Center, and ordered more training on handcuffing inmates. It's all aimed at achieving the tricky balance between safety and proper treatment in dealing with often-difficult inmates. (The inmate in the latest publicized incident allegedly had headbutted a deputy, giving her a concussion.)

McDonnell has shown the kind of instinct voters hoped he would after they chose the former LAPD second-in-command and Long Beach police chief to be the new sheriff last November.

But this is not the end of his first big test.

McDonnell must, as he says, hire more of "the right people with the right moral compass" for the 18,000-employee department.

He must keep pursuing restructuring and procedural reforms that will outlast his best employees.

He must win buy-in from the deputies' union, whose reaction to abuse allegations is usually to blame supervisors and official procedures.

He must champion independent oversight by Inspector General Max Huntsman and a civilian panel, and support their having subpoena power.

And he must continue to do what he just did: Act fast, decisively and publicly to assure Sheriff's Department employees and the public that abuse will not be tolerated.

The department's troubles have run deep. They won't be fixed immediately, but they can be fixed. Incidents like the one alleged to have occurred last month are reminders that McDonnell has a lot more work to do.

Grant could cut jail population

By Sarah Favot
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As the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department grapples with allegations an inmate was handcuffed for hours and left without food, agency executives are exploring ways to reduce the county's inmate population.

Sheriff Jim McDonnell will ask the county Board of Supervisors today to approve a $150,000 grant aimed at reducing the jail population.

Sheriff's Department staff will explore using a system to assess an inmate's risk when deciding which inmates would be released.

The jails remain "extremely challenged and overcrowded," McDonnell wrote in a memo to the supervisors. The county's jail system is the largest in the nation with about 17,000 inmates housed on average daily. The jails hold about 3,000 more inmates than the state recommends.

McDonnell said the department will focus on evaluating a portion of the inmates who are considered low-risk and who are awaiting trial.

About half the inmates are awaiting trial, and a "segment" of those inmates remain in jail because they can't afford to post bail.

McDonnell expects that his staff will be able to come up with ways to reduce the pre-trial inmate population by at least 10 to 15 percent, placing those inmates in community treatment and supervision.

McDonnell said it will reduce overcrowding and operational costs and allow the inmates who remain in the system to have better access to care and treatment. "Jail violence will also be affected and the predatory behavior of higher-risk inmates preying upon less criminally sophisticated inmates will be reduced," McDonnell wrote.

Samuel Pillsbury, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, said that the county could adopt ways to individualize bail amounts for inmates. In the federal criminal justice system, reports about each defendant are created for a judge or magistrate to review before bail is set.

The reduction in the inmate population could also help prevent incidents like what happened on June 19 in the Inmate Reception Center where an inmate, who the sheriff said was mentally ill, was allegedly handcuffed and left without food for 32 hours.

"Anything that helps reduce the workload for the correctional staff should increase the quality of supervision in the jails," Pillsbury said. According to the grant agreement, the Sheriff's Department must produce a report on its findings. An interim report will be due Nov. 30. A final report is due May 31.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is one of 20 law enforcement agencies in the country that received the grants totalling $75 million funded by the MacArthur Foundation.

Residents get taken for a ride by supes' cars

L.A. County residents, which is to say Americans, which is to say everyone in the world, take pride in the ride. Nothing wrong with that.

This auto-fixation manifests itself in remarkably different ways, though. But whether you show off by hand-waxing your chopped and cherried Impala or by intentionally leaving your Prius unwashed to show your drought-correctness, it comes from the same human place.

Politicians, drawn to power as they are, not unexpectedly tend to favor the power vehicle. That's often enough a honking black SUV, a taste they share with Sinaloan drug lords.

And so it's a Denali, big as Alaska, for Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich, and a Chevy Tahoe, nearly its rival in living large, for Supervisor Don Knabe.

Around the globe, these road warriors do indeed convey that a VIP is tucked inside. But to the extent that the power-hungry realize that remaining in high station is possible only by staying popular, wouldn't you think more would have learned the lesson of that long-ago first term of Gov. Jerry Brown?

Brown's no pauper. He's a lawyer. He comes from an old California family. He owns a sizeable ranch. But choosing to drive a cheap, ugly, 1974 blue Plymouth Satellite that looked like an undercover cop car from a small-town police department was PR genius. We, the people, are paying for the car, after all. Driving the Plymouth said: "I'm a penny-pincher when it comes to your money." Music to the ears of taxpayers.

Los Angeles County leaders didn't get the political memo. As staff writer Mike Reicher detailed on Sunday, along with the new SUVs — hybrids, it must be noted — of Antonovich and Knabe, Hilda Solis has a new Ford Fusion Titanium Hybrid and Sheila Kuehl an Acura RDX "compact luxury crossover SUV." All of them cost north of $40,000, with both Antonovich and Knabe going over the supposed $50,000 limits on the lease-purchases. To his credit, Mark Ridley-Thomas had the county buy the 2006 Chrysler 300 he drove in the Legislature, a relative jalopy at $21,445 — still, a gas-guzzler. We pay for that gas and that of *more than 520* department heads and other nabobs of the Hall of Administration who drive taxpayer-paid cars.

The luxury vehicles fly in the face of promises made after a county grand jury issued a report in 2008 lambasting officials for almost always buying luxury vehicles on the public dime when ordinary vehicles would do. County leaders said they would institute a tracking policy to see how many cars were high-end. They did so — for just one year. Then, it was business as usual. The percentage of luxury-category cars actually has gone up since then.

And, no wonder. Every time they feel the bone-jarring jolt from another pothole on the 5 in downtown L.A., taxpayers, too wish that money were no object when it comes to their own commuter cars. Antonovich's office notes that the Fifth District is as big as the other four combined, containing as it does the Angeles National Forest, "with rural areas and some rugged terrain — in addition to seasonal snow, mud and floods."

That was a target-rich quote for a journalist. Reicher asked when the boss last drove in the snow here in Southern California. "We feel we've responded satisfactorily to your questions and appreciate your efforts," came the office's reply.

Do all the hundreds of fire captains and other county workers who get cars to take home in case of emergency really need them? Our own personal cars usually start just fine in the middle of the night.

Editorial WED 7-15-15 Daily Breeze

Foster kids bills should not give doctors a pass

A package of four bills headed through the California Legislature this summer will help stem the tide of powerful psychotropic medication prescribed for as many as 1 in 4 foster children.

The legislation may not be enough. But it's a good start, even though it steers clear of imposing requirements directly on doctors who prescribe the drugs to foster kids. The bills should become law.

"Drugging our Kids," a Bay Area News Group investigative series by reporter Karen de Sá, brought this problem to lawmakers' attention. De Sá found a pervasive pattern of prescribing psychotropic medication to children with emotional or behavioral problems, often without trying less invasive remedies first and apparently without understanding the kids' medical history, including what other drugs they're taking. Doctors also prescribe "off label," meaning in amounts far greater than recommended doses or to children younger than recommended in FDA approvals.

State Sens. Jim Beall, D-San Jose, Bill Monning, D-Carmel, and Holly Mitchell, D-Los Angeles, have stepped up admirably to improve monitoring and accountability when foster children are placed on medication. The legislation — Senate Bills 238, 253, 319 and 484 — funds and empowers juvenile courts and social service agencies to better monitor kids' health and to push back when prescribed medication seems excessive or inappropriate.

Yes, doctors should be regulated directly. They're the ones prescribing drugs — and, de Sá found, taking gifts and payments from drugmakers in greater amounts than the average physician typically accepts.

But the medical lobby is powerful. Child advocates hit massive resistance when they tried to set rules for physicians. Doctors say judges, nurses and social workers lack the expertise to second-guess them — but there's clearly a systemic problem of over-drugging, and the docs are not using their expertise to police themselves. Nor are they using good judgment in accepting gifts from drug companies.

Given the difficulty in bucking the medical establishment, these bills makes sense.

"Right now it's just a river of meds, and we're building a dam," Anna Johnson, policy analyst for the National Center for Youth Law, told de Sá.

It might be enough to get doctors' attention. And if it's not, advocates and lawmakers will need to try again.

We'll be watching.