

Video shows use of force on teen

Supervisor keeps job despite call for his firing from panel of probation officials.

BY JAMES QUEALLY AND MELISSA GOMEZ

Beckham just wanted something to eat.

It was a Friday afternoon at Camp Kilpatrick — the Malibu juvenile facility where the 17-year-old had spent the previous five months — and his search for food led him to a common area. But all he found was a carton of milk.

This wasn't the first time he'd been left hungry while in the custody of the Los Angeles County Probation Department, Beckham said. But it would soon become the most memorable.

Beckham said he confronted staff, grew frustrated and threw the milk carton. An argument erupted between the boy and several officers.

Within minutes, Beckham found himself trapped under the weight of five people, screaming in pain.

Video of the October 2020 incident, recently obtained by The Times, shows four officers grabbing the boy's limbs, forcing him onto a bed by his neck and placing a knee in his back. Beckham's body twitches as he is restrained.

Roughly a minute into the conflict, with Beckham appearing subdued by the other officers, supervisor Oscar Cross takes hold of the 120-pound teen's legs and begins to bend his feet toward his head.

"Mamá, mamá," Beckham screams.

Several officers who reviewed the footage described the incident as "child abuse." Less than a year after the episode, a Probation Department "roundtable" determined that Cross should be fired, according to an email sent in 2021.

But Cross remains a supervisor in the facility after Chief Probation Officer Adolfo Gonzales spared him from termination, according to department records reviewed by The Times and a statement from the agency.

Gonzales declined to share the video with oversight agencies that monitor the troubled Probation Department. Nor did he provide it to the Los Angeles County district attorney's office for review, despite being urged to do so by other

[See Juvenile, A7]

Amid quake ruins, jubilation

Onlookers in Turkey rejoice as survivors are found four days after the devastating temblor. **WORLD, A3**

Red, white, blue don't yield green

Climate activists say Fourth of July fireworks contribute to environmental damage. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Good news from the IRS

The state Middle Class Tax Refund won't be counted as income on federal filings, agency says. **BUSINESS, A9**

Weather

Cooler. L.A. Basin: 63/43. **B8**

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GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

LAPD DET. Tamara Momayez, left, filmmaker Rachel Mason, internet sleuth Clark Williams and Det. John Lamberti at the site where body parts of Bill Newton were discovered more than three decades ago.

COLUMN ONE

Haunted by a heinous case

Amateur sleuths help police secure a confession in the murder of gay porn actor Bill Newton, whose head was found in a dumpster in 1990

BY KEVIN RECTOR

The first time most people in Los Angeles heard of gay porn actor Billy London — a.k.a. Bill Newton — was when his head and feet showed up in a dumpster.

Newton's murder in the fall of 1990 rattled the close-knit gay enclave of West Hollywood, even amid the unrelenting wave of young men dying from AIDS. Homicide detectives with the Los Angeles Police Department diligently pursued the case but kept running into dead ends in a community with good reason to distrust them.

For the next 30 years, Newton remained one of L.A.'s many unavenged souls. The LAPD's interviews and investigative notes went cold. His murder — easily painted with broad strokes in film noir gray — became an unfair allegory about Hollywood's gay underbelly and the supposed wickedness of sex work.

But in a twist most true-crime fans could only dream of, a team of amateur internet sleuths has helped crack the case.

On Monday, a pair of cold-case detectives confirmed they had secured a confession in Newton's murder. His alleged killer, they said, was another former gay porn actor in West Hollywood. The suspect is serving a life

[See Newton, A6]



MARC RABINS

NEWTON, a.k.a. Billy London, was a Wisconsin transplant whose slaying rattled West Hollywood.

Liberal Portland confronts an identity crisis



NATHAN HOWARD Getty Images

PROTESTERS in April 2021 watch a structure burn after Portland police shot a homeless man. Tensions were already high with the city convulsed by unrest.

As homelessness and crime rise in famously progressive city, solutions are elusive.

BY JENNY JARVIE

PORTLAND, Ore. — If you want to understand the schism that dominates the political and social landscape in this famously liberal city, a walk down Southeast Rhine Street might be a good place to start.

Flora Gonzalez, who lives on the north side of the street, is distressed about conditions in the historically blue-collar neighborhood.

The 40-year-old package handler for FedEx said that people have openly dealt

drugs and urinated on the sidewalk outside her family's duplex. They've dumped feces and used syringes in her manicured yard, played booming music at 3 a.m. and stripped stolen cars for parts. Shots have been fired behind her children's bedroom.

"We feel abandoned," Gonzalez said. "We pay our taxes and the police are not watching over our security."

But Juniper Simonis, who rents a home across the street, said she opposed calls for police clampdowns.

The 38-year-old environmental biologist and data scientist, whose frontyard features a handmade "DISARM, DEFUND, DISMANTLE POLICE" sign, said

Portland officials continued

[See Portland, A12]

Why we're under de-influence

As budgets tighten, online creators pivot to telling fans how to find deals and 'dupes.'

BY BRIAN CONTRERAS

At first glance, Jacquelyn Mengel's TikTok looks like every other influencer video. She stares directly into the camera, holds up name-brand makeup products and discusses how she feels about each one. It's a familiar scene on social media: someone trying to sell you something.

Except this time, that's

not what's going on. She's telling you what *not* to buy.

"Another de-influencing video," explains Mengel, 20, "so that we can all save some money."

The web personality walks her viewers through a handful of different beauty products she doesn't think are worth the price tag: an underwhelming shampoo and conditioner, a \$20 make-up sponge. It's hardly anti-consumerist — Mengel suggests a cheaper alternative to each overpriced item — but the talk of belt-tightening seems to have struck a nerve with fans. Her video sits at more than 750,000 views.

It's all part of a trend that's taken TikTok by storm in recent weeks — "de-influencing" — that finds social media creators calling out trendy products that aren't worth the cash amid a moment of economic turmoil. And viewers looking to save a little dough are eating it up: Videos tagged #deinfluencing have already been watched 125 million cumulative times.

This might not be what you'd expect from influencers, who — posing on the bow of a yacht or a posh rooftop deck, dripping with designer jewelry and haute couture — aren't known as a

[See TikTok, A8]



KRISTIN WILSON GONZALEZ

JACQUELYN MENGEL credits her speedy audience growth to adapting to fans' new economic reality.

MISSILE DOWNS OBJECT IN U.S. AIRSPACE

Biden orders mystery craft shot from the sky near Alaska's border with Canada.

BY TRACY WILKINSON AND KWASI GYAMFI ASIEDU

WASHINGTON — A week after Americans were transfixed by a Chinese balloon traversing the nation on an alleged spy mission until it was shot from the sky over the Atlantic Ocean, the U.S. military on Friday downed a high-flying object in U.S. airspace off Alaska.

White House officials, who revealed the news when a reporter asked about rumors of the craft, said the unidentified object was shot down by a U.S. Air Force fighter jet because it was flying at about 40,000 feet and posed a "reasonable threat" to the safety of civilian flights.

National Security Council spokesman John F. Kirby said that unlike the earlier craft, a huge balloon transporting a massive payload, there was no immediate evidence that this flying object was engaged in surveillance.

President Biden, asked about the downing of the object as he met with the president of Brazil, said that "it was a success."

He has been criticized in some quarters for waiting several days to order the destruction of the Chinese balloon last Saturday, and appears to have acted particularly quickly this time.

Friday's incident and the flurry of activity surrounding it come as U.S. citizens and officials are on edge over revelations of an apparently vast and pervasive Chinese espionage program involving sophisticated balloons, which U.S. officials say have flown over 40 nations in five continents in the last several

[See Object, A8]

Video shows use of force at juvenile camp

[Juvenile, from A1] county officials, according to a person with direct knowledge of the situation.

The Times obtained the video from probation officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation from Gonzales. Beckham agreed to an interview on the condition that only his first name be used, since he was a juvenile at the time of the incident.

Attempts to contact Cross were unsuccessful. In a statement, the Probation Department said Gonzales "made the decision to impose progressive discipline" rather than fire Cross. His decision, the department said, was based on "a review of the evidence, consideration of the officer's service record and input from SEIU local 721" — the union that represents Probation Department supervisors.

"The case was handled according to the normal procedures for use of force incidents, a process in which the Chief is ultimately responsible for determining discipline," the statement read.

Criminal justice experts who reviewed the footage said they were horrified.

"It was an unjustified use of force being used against a child, and there was no apparent risk to anyone that needed to be stopped in its tracks," said Michele Dietch, director of the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab at the University of Texas at Austin. "It was just very clearly excessive use of physical force on the part of the staff and a real lack of concern on the part of the staff who are observing the situation."

The president of SEIU local 721 declined to comment on the specifics of the incident but, in a statement, lashed out at county officials for failing to provide the understaffed Probation Department with resources for conflict resolution.

Jim Schoengarth, president of the union, said his members "are working in increasingly dangerous environments with little support from the [L.A. County] Board of Supervisors, which has failed to provide the policies, training and tools to keep officers safe in the face of 100+ youth-on-youth assaults each month."

The videotaped incident is the latest controversy for



AN IMAGE from leaked L.A. County Probation Department video of officers subduing a 17-year-old boy.

the Probation Department.

A state oversight board in recent years has repeatedly deemed the department unsuitable to care for youth, and a Times investigation found that incidents of violence between officers and youth increased dramatically last year. The surge came as the agency deals with a continuing staffing crisis.

Additionally, the L.A. County Office of the Inspector General found that the department carried out a rushed transfer of youth between facilities last year that led to fights and injuries — solely to avoid a negative review from an oversight agency.

But the Cross incident long predates the staffing shortage or the surge in assaults that Schoengarth referenced in his statement.

At the time of the episode involving Cross and Beckham, the average number of juveniles in the custody of the Probation Department was significantly lower than usual, as youths were being released at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of incidents of violence among youths at that time was nowhere near the 100 per month Schoengarth cites, records show.

After The Times began asking about the video that ended with Beckham screaming, L.A. County Inspector General Max Huntsman said he launched an investigation "into the decision making and actions of the probation department" in relation to the 2020 incident, including the way the chief meted out disci-

pline to Cross.

Watching the footage for the first time, Beckham's aunt, who declined to be named, said it looked like the officers were trying to suffocate her nephew.

"To try and calm a child like that isn't going to work; it's only going to make it worse," she said. "And then to grab his feet like that, to treat him like that — they don't even treat animals like that in this country."

Sitting in his family's home last month, Beckham watched the video for the first time. He was quiet as he watched himself struggle against the weight of the officers. By the time the clip had finished, he was incensed.

"That makes me mad," he said, his hand in a fist. "I don't like what they do, but when you're in there, they're in charge. ... It's very ugly, isn't it?"

Beckham, now 19, remembers fearing his leg would break.

"When I'm screaming, it's because I couldn't breathe," he said.

After the incident, Beckham said, he was sent to a nurse who gave him medicine to calm him down. Records show he was not treated for serious injuries.

Beckham wanted to report the incident but changed his mind after a probation officer warned that he could be sent to a county juvenile hall. Knowing that the halls are more like jails than Camp Kilpatrick — which the department describes as embodying a "culture of care rather than a culture of control" — Beckham chose to stay

quiet, he said.

The teen had been arrested on suspicion of sexual battery prior to his stay at Kilpatrick, according to a law enforcement source with knowledge of the situation.

Tiffany Blacknell, chief spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, said she could not comment on charges against a minor, as such information is not in the public record. The Probation Department did not respond to questions about Beckham's incarceration.

Beckham's family members say they are unsure how his case was resolved. But he spent nine months in Kilpatrick; juveniles placed into the camp system, as opposed to one of the county's two juvenile halls, have either been convicted of a crime or agreed to a plea deal, probation officials said. Minors awaiting trial on charges would be housed in either the Barry J. Nidorf or Central juvenile halls.

Blacknell said the office did not receive any information about Cross' use of force from the Probation Department.

According to a copy of a "physical intervention report" reviewed by The Times, Cross said Beckham was "kicking his legs and violently out of control." Cross said the teen pulled on his arm, initiating the conflict.

The video does not reflect Beckham kicking violently and shows Cross reaching for the teen first. When Beckham grabs Cross' wrist in response, the supervisor shoves the boy into a wall.

Inside the Probation Department, Cross' conduct became a point of concern, according to officials with knowledge of the situation.

A high-ranking probation source said one department director described Cross' conduct as a "problem" in a 2021 phone call to discuss the incident. An official with the L.A. County Counsel's office suggested that criminal charges be filed during a meeting to discuss discipline against Cross, the source said.

A spokesperson for County Counsel referred all questions to the Probation Department.

In July 2021, Gonzales requested the results of an internal disciplinary "roundtable" on several use-of-

force incidents, including the one involving Cross, according to department emails reviewed by The Times.

"Can someone please brief me on the disciplinary recommendations? I want to be involved in the final decision," the chief wrote.

In response, another probation official told Gonzales that the roundtable had decided that two officers involved in the incident should face suspension, and a third should receive a letter of reprimand. The roundtable unanimously voted to fire Cross, according to the email.

Gonzales overrode the recommendation on Cross. It was not clear if he altered the outcomes for other officers involved in the incident with Beckham.

Roundtables typically comprise high-level probation personnel who make disciplinary recommendations, according to a law enforcement source. Representatives from the Office of the Inspector General, L.A. County Counsel and the Probation Department's internal affairs unit may also be present, the source said. But in its statement, the Probation Department said the chief has final say on all disciplinary decisions.

Cross' continued employment does not sit well with a number of veteran probation officers.

"It broke my heart seeing it. I've seen kids go through pain, but I've never in my career, in 20 years, seen a kid scream the way this kid screamed. It almost made me cry," said one veteran officer who reviewed the footage. "Once [Cross] stepped in, everything went wrong. It was beyond excessive force. This was child abuse."

The case highlights broader concerns about the way the Probation Department handles reports of abuse and violence in its juvenile facilities.

The Office of the Inspector General in December raised concerns that the department was withholding details of controversial incidents from oversight agencies.

The issues arose in a report about the department's compliance with a California Department of Justice settlement stemming from pri-

or allegations of violence in the facilities and improper use of force by officers.

"There appears to be a pattern of reluctance to engage with oversight in an attempt to avoid negative findings," the report read, referencing a November 2022 incident in which several youth got into a fight, and one wielded a metal pipe. The department did not report that brawl to any oversight agency.

The report also referenced an incident — first revealed by The Times in November — in which a youth alleged he was choked and beaten while being forced into his room by eight officers. According to the OIG report, the Probation Department's internal affairs unit refused to investigate the youth's claims of unnecessary force.

"[Internal Affairs] rejected this because [the youth was able to state he couldn't breathe, this meant his airway was not constricted and that any claim by the youth that he was strangled would be contradicted by staff members,]" the report read. "It is unconscionable that presumptions such as these were made without conducting an investigation."

Milinda Kakani, a member of the L.A. County Probation Oversight Committee and director of youth justice policy at the Children's Defense Fund, said she was concerned by the use of force seen in the video and the fact that Cross was allowed to keep his job.

"That was really hard to watch," she said. "Hearing that young person — it sounded like begging, those sounds of desperation — I cannot shake that."

No one in Beckham's family was aware of the incident before being contacted by The Times. The boy said he never told anyone.

When informed that Cross was still working at the camp, with power over teens in the same position Beckham once was, his aunt said she felt powerless.

"That person is an animal. He doesn't know how to treat people right, and whatever child that goes to [Camp Kilpatrick] is in danger," she said. "If he hasn't killed a child yet, it's because God is watching over those children."

Trump team handed over more sensitive records, source says

An empty classified folder and a laptop were also reportedly given to investigators.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Lawyers for former President Trump have turned over to federal investigators additional documents with classified markings in recent months as well as a laptop belonging to a Trump aide, a person familiar with the situation said Friday night.

The lawyers also provided an empty folder with classified markings, according to the person, who spoke to the Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

A Justice Department special counsel has been investigating Trump's retention of hundreds of documents marked as classified at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago.

FBI agents who served a search warrant at the property in August recovered roughly 100 classified docu-

ments, including records classified at the top-secret level. A federal grand jury has been hearing evidence in the case for months.

ABC News first reported the discovery of the additional documents.

The person familiar with the matter said a handful of pages with classified markings were found weeks ago during a search at the Mar-a-Lago complex that was supervised by Trump's legal team, and were promptly provided to the Justice Department. The documents were found in a box containing thousands of pages, the source said.

Also Friday, the FBI searched the Indiana home of former Vice President Mike Pence and found an additional document with classified markings, following his lawyers' discovery last month of other sensitive documents.

FBI officials have also searched President Biden's homes in Delaware after his lawyers found documents with classified markings at his Wilmington, Del., property and one of his former offices in Washington.



U.S. Department of Justice

THE FBI previously seized these classified records and more from the former president's Florida estate.



CODY BLACKBIRD, performing at Native Art Market in Scottsdale, Ariz., says his dance group feels unsafe.

Man's racist rant targets Native dancers

Phoenix-area incident during Super Bowl week raises calls for hate crime charges.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Native American dancers who were the target of a racist rant by a suburban Phoenix gallery owner as they were filmed for Super Bowl week are pushing for hate crime charges.

Gilbert Ortega Jr., owner of Gilbert Ortega Native American Galleries, has been charged with three misdemeanor counts of disorderly conduct regarding the incident, Scottsdale police said.

Cody Blackbird, a dancer and flutist who filmed the tirade, said his group doesn't feel safe, and the incident ruined an otherwise celebratory week.

"Us performers are now going in different entrances and parking in different places. This man is known,"

Blackbird said. "There's a 10-year-old girl who was there. She's forever imprinted with 'This is what happened when the Super Bowl came to town.'"

The group is seeking the involvement of the FBI, U.S. Justice Department and Arizona attorney general's office.

The confrontation occurred Tuesday afternoon in Old Town Scottsdale, which has been seeing a high volume of visitors who are in town for the big game and the Phoenix Open golf tournament. Ten dancers were performing in front of the Native Art Market on Main Street. ESPN filmed the group in the store, then had the dancers pose outside by a Super Bowl sign.

That's when Ortega started yelling at them, Blackbird said. In the video, Ortega can be seen mocking them and yelling, "You [explicit] Indians."

His shop was closed Friday, and a listed number appears to not be in service. There was no immediate response to messages from the

Associated Press seeking comment that were left at phone numbers and email addresses listed for him.

In Arizona, there is no law specific to a hate crime. It can be used as an aggravating circumstance in the commission of a crime in which the motive was bias against a victim's race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability.

Disorderly conduct does not qualify for a hate crime designation under the FBI's definition, according to Scottsdale authorities. The FBI website describes a hate crime as "often a violent crime, such as assault, murder, arson, vandalism or threats to commit such crimes."

Blackbird, who is of Eastern Band Cherokee and Dakota descent, said some Navajo performers heard Ortega making threats in their language that had violent and sexual innuendos. He alleges that Ortega charged at them and had to be physically restrained. He said he doesn't see why the

incident is not being treated as a hate crime.

"That's what it's seeming like, which really creates some horrible precedents, dangerous precedents," said Blackbird, who has retained an attorney.

Meanwhile, the video has gained traction on social media and brought unwanted attention to Scottsdale. Mayor David Ortega, who is not related to the gallery owner, called the incident "reprehensible and inexcusable."

"The behavior exhibited by this individual saddens and disgusts the people of our community," the mayor said in a statement.

Blackbird said there are growing calls on social media for artists to boycott Ortega's business. He said racism exists even among those whose business hinges on Indigenous people.

"That's always been a thing in the Indian trader world," Blackbird said. "They don't care about the people that are making the items they're selling and re-designing."