



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES SHERIFF CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

World Trade Center
350 South Figueroa Street, Suite 288, Los Angeles California 90071
(213) 253-5678

Brian K. Williams
Executive Director

MEMBERS

Patti Giggans
Chair

Robert C. Bonner
Commissioner

James P. Harris
Commissioner

Sean Kennedy
Commissioner

Priscilla Ocen
Vice-Chair

Lael Rubin
Commissioner

Xavier Thompson
Commissioner

Casimiro Tolentino
Commissioner

Hernán Vera
Commissioner

March 18, 2019

The Honorable Alex Villanueva, Sheriff
Los Angeles County Sheriff
211 Temple St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Independent Civilian Oversight Reforms

Dear Sheriff Villanueva:

The Los Angeles County Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission (COC) was established by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 2016 to advance transparency, accountability, and better communication between the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) and the communities that it serves. The COC has worked collaboratively with the LASD and local stakeholders to build community trust through reform.

That partnership has already produced important reforms, such as: significantly increasing the number of mental evaluation teams; better compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act in local jails; the initiation of a Family Assistance Program that improves the interaction between LASD and the families of individuals involved in deadly encounters with the LASD, and setting the stage for the implementation of a long-overdue body-worn camera program for LASD patrol deputies. We cannot rest on our laurels, however, because there is still so much more to be done.

Unfortunately, recent statements and actions by LASD officials have turned back the clock on reforms and seriously eroded community trust. For example, your unilateral reinstatement of a deputy sheriff previously fired for credible accusations of domestic violence seriously undermines transparency and accountability. It sends a troubling message to victims of domestic violence who must turn to LASD for support. Using a "Truth and Reconciliation Panel," where four of the five proposed members answer directly to you, to justify that legally questionable personnel decision, invites cynicism about the LASD's commitment to real reform especially since steps were taken to reinstate the deputy before you were even sworn in as Sheriff. Moreover, in light of the recent motion by the Board of Supervisors and questions concerning the legality of this panel, it would not be appropriate for the COC to endorse or engage in the formulation of this process at this time.

Your pledge to roll back use-of-force policies adopted in response to recommendations by the independent Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence also hurts public trust. Those policies dramatically reduced the number of violent incidents in our jails, as well as judgments and settlements related to the improper use of force against inmates. Instead of undoing existing

March 18, 2019

Page 2

reforms, the LASD should rightly be investigating and implementing more reforms, to decrease uses of force on the streets in addition to in the jails.

The COC sometimes requests historical records and statistics from the LASD in a good faith effort to reach informed recommendations based on full and accurate information. Of late, our requests to the LASD have been met with dissembling and stonewalling. For example, when the LASD dragged its feet investigating deputy cliques, the COC requested documents reflecting LASD management's knowledge of and attempts to address the cliques. This is an important oversight issue because the proliferation of deputy cliques escalates uses of force, raises constitutional issues about disclosure prior to trial, and foments morale problems. The LASD initially delayed responding and later produced a single non-responsive report about street gangs. This is unacceptable.

While we understand that the LASD's California Public Records Act (CPRA) unit is understaffed, a request for information from the COC is not a mere CPRA request; it is a necessary component of our independent civilian oversight function. The COC cannot fulfill its oversight mission in any meaningful manner without timely and complete access to all relevant information.

The reforms at issue are the product of years of study, robust debate, collaboration and advocacy. They are critical to effectuating constitutional policing, restoring the community's trust in LASD, and achieving long-term systemic change. These reforms are far more important than any level of politics and acrimony. The COC is committed to continuing to push for reform in the LASD and we are hopeful that you will wholeheartedly join us in this effort.

We request that you attend the March 26, 2019 COC public hearing to discuss our concerns.

Respectfully,



Patti Giggans
Chair, COC



Priscilla Ocen
Vice-Chair, COC



Brian K. Williams
Executive Director, COC