



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES PROBATION COMMISSION
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December 12, 2019

JOE GARDNER
PRESIDENT

To: Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Chair
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Hilda Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Janice Hahn

CC: Chief Probation Officer Terri McDonald

From: Joe Gardner
Probation Commission President

**URGENT REQUEST FOR CONSIDERATION AND ACTION TO CORRECT CONDITIONS
WITHIN THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT.**

We, the members of the Los Angeles County Probation Commission are compelled to submit this letter to inform you of the current state of the Probation Department. We are also providing specific advice to improve safety and enhance operations of the Department. The Department has reached a point in its history that requires a calculated course correction.

With the pending departure of Chief McDonald, the selection of a new Chief Probation Officer will be critical. The Department has endured changes in leadership seven times in the last ten years. With each change in leadership, confidence has been eroded. Members of the Department's labor force have been very vocal about poor working conditions and confusion in the implementation of policies and procedures.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors to consider taking as much time as necessary to select a replacement for Chief McDonald. The largest probation department in the nation deserves an individual who has the temperament, skills and willingness to remain the Department's leader for the long haul so that reforms can continue to be implemented.

We also urge the Board of Supervisors to direct an extensive exit interview with Chief McDonald to seek her candid assessment of the operations of the Probation Department to identify its strengths and weaknesses. She may hold valuable insight on a possible replacement. Interim appointments from within the department should be considered until the hiring process is complete. The County Board of Supervisors can end this negative cycle of leadership change and internal disruption for the good of the people who work and are under the care and custody of the Probation Department. (See attachment for further recommendations from Commissioner Yamashiro)

Commissioners

Joe Gardner-President, Hon. Jan Levine (Ret)-1st Vice President, Hon. Betsy Butler (Ret.), 2nd Vice President,
Donald Meredith-Sergeant at Arms, Daniel Seaver, Azael Martinez-Sonoqui, Cyn Yamashiro, Esq., Jacqueline Caster, Esq.
Jo Kaplan, Esq. Olivia E. Mitchell, Peter Shutan, Rev. Zachary Hoover, Randy Herbon, Gale Swartz

"In pursuit of reforms and accountability for better outcomes through oversight, transparency and community engagement."

As part of our mandated function, the Los Angeles County Probation Commission has conducted fifteen hearings this year, covering a wide range of important topics affecting the Probation Department. Throughout the year, our dedicated commissioners have conducted site visits and mandated inspections of the County's juvenile halls and camps and have seen first-hand the day-to-day operations of the Department, including its responses to critical incidents such as brush fire evacuations, riots, assaults and disturbances within the facilities. It is our assessment the following issues must urgently be addressed to reform the Los Angeles County Probation Department. They are listed below:

- Stop further closures of Probation Department facilities to assure some facilities are held in reserve and in a state of readiness to accommodate emergency situations and use as housing for violators who assault staff and other minors. Insulating victims from perpetrators will enhance safety and send a message that such behavior will not be tolerated.
- Physical separation of first-time offenders from repeat offenders and gang-involved youth must be done to assure safety and deter intimidation. First-time offenders must be given every opportunity to succeed and excel during their camp assignments, so they do not recidivate.
- Implement immediate unambiguous and uniform department-wide training on:
 - De-escalation techniques.
 - Well-defined procedures for reporting and handling violent criminal offenses committed against minors and personnel.
 - Use-of-force procedures.
 - Training for individual defense and safety tactics for all hall and camp personnel.
- Full establishment of a dedicated mental health facility operated by mental health professionals with peripheral security provided by the Probation Department to include the implementation of treatment programs that provide a thorough initial assessment during the juvenile camp placement process and throughout the duration of incarceration and beyond release.
- Consistent programming and vocational training for youth across all camps that include:
 - Opportunities for vocation certifications and employment.
 - Fast-track stream of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act funding to qualified community-based organizations to further facilitate programming.
- Establish an independent grievance system in advance of the implementation of the Probation Oversight Commission to assure transparency and accountability.
- Fund Chief McDonald's recommendations to electronically collect and maintain data on the Probation Department's operations so future audits and inspections can track outcomes of minors moving through the detention facilities.
- Replace dilapidated Central Juvenile Hall.
- Assess and divert manpower department-wide to cover staff shortages and maintain staffing levels within custodial facilities to assure safety, facilitate programming and general control.
 - Hold all personnel accountable for absences.
- Allow Probation Department representatives of labor groups to be partners and treated as stakeholders at the table of discussion regarding reforms and improvements to the department.

The Los Angeles Probation Department's stated mission is to rebuild lives. Dedicated employees strive to do this task each day and should expect department leadership to be supportive in furthering this mission. Deterring recidivism is key to protecting our community from crime. The lives and futures of those under that care of department are at stake. Minors under the care of the Department should be afforded every opportunity obtain the skills and education to lead secure and productive lives after their terms of detention are completed.

We must stabilize the leadership of the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The Department has suffered due to instability and it has created cynicism, poor working conditions and minimal care of resident minors. The youth who reside in our camps must receive the rehabilitative services voiced by community stakeholders and promised by the Probation Department under programs like the "L.A. Model."

ATTACHMENT

The selection of a Probation Chief must be a transparent process that includes the public and those impacted by the policies and the failures of the Probation Department.

The selection of every other law enforcement leader in Los Angeles County faces a public process. The Los Angeles Police Department selection process for police chief featured numerous town halls that included all potential candidates. The County Sheriff is elected by voters of the County.

We recommend the Probation Commission hold public meetings featuring the candidates process, fostering transparency and giving stakeholders and community members an opportunity to voice their support or concerns about potential candidates.

Submitted by Commissioner Cyn Yamashiro
November 14, 2019

A vote of the Probation Commission was taken on December 12, 2019 and votes were recorded below. Commissioners who voted in support respectfully submit this letter to the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors for their consideration and action.

Hon. Jan Levine (Ret), 1st Vice President	Yes
Hon. Betsy Butler (Ret.), 2 nd Vice President	Yes
Donald Meredith, Sergeant at Arms	Yes
Daniel Seaver	Yes
Azael Martinez-Sonoqui	Yes
Cyn Yamashiro, Esq.	Support
Jacqueline Caster, Esq.	Yes
Jo Kaplan, Esq.	Supports
Olivia E. Mitchell	Yes
Peter Shutan	Supports
Randy Herbon	Yes
Gale Swartz	Supports
Joe Gardner, President	Yes