

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE

THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT'S TARGETED HARASSMENT of GRIEVING FAMILIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents serious abuses of power by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) in the form of harassment of the families of individuals LASD deputies have killed. From November 2015 to November 2020, there were 133 LASD deputy shootings.¹ Some of the families of these individuals have bravely spoken out publicly against the killings of their loved ones. LASD deputies have responded to these families who are exercising their First Amendment rights by aggressively and continuously harassing them.

To provide a glimpse into the severity of LASD's harassment of families who have spoken out against the department following the killing of their loved ones, this report chronicles the harassment of the family members of Paul Rea and Anthony Vargas, who were both shot and killed by LASD deputies. Eighteen-year-old Paul Rea was shot multiple times by East Los Angeles LASD Deputy Hector Saavedra (badge number 608299) on June 27, 2019. Deputy Saavedra has been identified as prospective member of the East Los Angeles Banditos deputy gang at the time of Paul's murder.² Twenty-one-year-old Anthony Vargas was fatally shot thirteen times by East Los Angeles LASD Deputies Nikolis Perez (badge number 602261) and Jonathan Rojas (badge number 602976), both of whom have also been identified as Banditos prospects.³

On an almost daily basis, LASD deputies try to intimidate relatives of Paul Rea and Anthony Vargas by slowly driving by or parking in front of their homes; slowly driving by memorial sites; damaging items at memorial sites; taunting family members with rude comments, gestures, smirks, and laughter; following family members while they are driving; parking outside family members' workplaces; and taking pictures of or recording family members. Deputies have also engaged in more serious and often illegal forms of harassment on a number of occasions, including targeting family members for arrest and detention without probable cause, frequently pulling over family members and searching their vehicles, and harassing family members of minor age. The following is a selection of these egregious incidents:

¹ Center for Juvenile Law and Policy, LMU Loyola Law School, *50 Years of Deputy Gangs in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department* (Jan. 2021) at 39.

² María Elena Salinas & Caitlin Yilek, *These Latino Victims' Families say they Were Targeted by Law Enforcement*, CBS News (Mar. 10, 2021) at 11:37-11:54 available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/anthony-vargas-paul-rea-sean-monterrosa-andres-guardado-los-angeles-sheriff-lawsuit/>.

³ *Id.* at 11:55-12:14.

- In October of 2019, Paul Rea's sister Jaylene spoke publicly for the first time about her brother's murder at the hands of LASD and later attended a town hall hosted by Sheriff Villanueva. Later that evening, LASD deputies forcefully arrested Jaylene at her brother's memorial site without probable cause that she committed any crime. At around 11:00 pm, deputies drove away with Jaylene in the back of a patrol car and would not tell her or her family where she was being taken or why she was arrested. They eventually took her to a hospital. During this time, for nearly two hours, LASD personnel did not provide Jaylene's family with any answers as to where she was, causing them severe emotional distress as they feared the worst. Jaylene likewise did not understand what was happening and feared for her safety. LASD deputies eventually brought her to the East Los Angeles Station around 1:00 am, when ACLU SoCal attorney Andrés Dae Keun Kwon was able to see her. Claiming no one on staff at the East Los Angeles station was able to run her fingerprints, LASD kept Jaylene overnight. Jaylene's family members and the ACLU SoCal attorney stayed at the East Los Angeles station until 7:00 am, when LASD finally released Jaylene. While she was detained, LASD personnel deleted videos Jaylene took of them on her phone.⁴
- After attending a town hall hosted by Sheriff Villanueva in September of 2019, Anthony Vargas's aunt, Valerie Vargas, was followed as she drove home by an unmarked black SUV with tinted windows and no license plates. The SUV followed her through side streets in East Los Angeles, onto the 710 freeway, and eventually off the freeway in Compton. The SUV followed her into a Walmart parking lot where it pulled up behind her, blocking her into the parking spot so she could not leave. She grabbed her cell phone to start recording and opened the car door and the SUV sped away.
- In February of 2020, LASD deputies harassed Paul Rea's fourteen year-old sister as she left her middle school, which is located across the street from the East Los Angeles station. She was wearing a sweatshirt with her brother's face and name on the front. As she was walking outside the school, two deputies stared at her and then started laughing. One of the deputies then got into a patrol car and pulled up alongside her. The patrol car followed her very slowly as she walked along the street. Janae ran into the library and called her mother for help.

⁴ See Letter to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and District Attorney Jackie Lacey, from Centro Community Service Organization, Black Lives Matter - Los Angeles, and American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, dated November 18, 2019. See also Taylor Walker, *Grieving Families Report Harassment from LASD Deputies, Civilian Oversight Commission Votes to Investigate*, WitnessLA (Nov. 21, 2019) available at <https://witnessla.com/grieving-families-report-harassment-from-lasd-deputies-civilian-oversight-commission-votes-to-investigate/>.

While the brave family members of Paul Rea and Anthony Vargas are adamant that they will not be bullied into silence, the ongoing harassment has had a profound impact on their lives. The psychological harm and toll of the harassment includes fear for their own and their loved ones' safety, fear of facing future harassment, traumatization, retraumatization, and disruption of the grieving process. Furthermore, the extensive harassment of these and other families who have spoken out against LASD has deterred other families who have lost loved ones at the hands of LASD from speaking out for fear of similar retaliation.

This harassment of Latinx and Black families who have lost loved ones to LASD's brutal violence—often at the hands of deputy gang members—must stop.⁵ The harassment of the families of Paul Rea and Anthony Vargas is only intensifying, especially as they continue to speak out against LASD on larger platforms. Losing a child, sibling, or relative suddenly at a young age is already traumatic enough. We must allow these families to grieve in peace and seek justice. We urge the Board of Supervisors to immediately adopt the following recommendations that are aimed at putting an end to LASD's harassment of families and holding LASD personnel who engage in this conduct accountable:

- Create an independent office of law enforcement standards that would operate independently of LASD and would investigate all allegations of misconduct and impose discipline.
- Create a reporting mechanism outside of LASD for incidents of family harassment.
- Complete an independent investigation into LASD's practice of family harassment.
- Fund and expand the Family Assistance Program to provide trauma-informed support to families who lose a loved one to LASD violence.
- Ensure that LASD adopts policies prohibiting harassing or intimidating conduct by LASD personnel towards families of people who have died in interactions with LASD and requiring sensitivity and respect when interacting with these families and when present at memorial sites.
- Ensure that LASD adopts a policy requiring the transferring of deputies involved in incidents of deadly force to different stations.
- Ensure compliance with state transparency laws.

⁵ To learn more about other Latinx and Black families' experiences of harassment by LASD, see Black Lives Matter - Los Angeles, *Stop LA Sheriff Attacks: Family Forum* (Mar. 27, 2021) available at <https://www.facebook.com/799880030084316/videos/347471413335304> and Sahra Sulaiman, *Families of Those Killed by LASD Describe Ongoing Harassment by Deputies as Part of a "Triple Assault"*, StreetsblogLA (Apr. 13, 2021) available at <https://la.streetsblog.org/2021/04/13/families-of-those-killed-by-lasd-describe-ongoing-harassment-by-deputies-as-part-of-a-triple-assault/>.

