



July 20, 2023

TO: Los Angeles County Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission
Professor Sean Kennedy, Chair, Civilian Oversight Commission
Danielle Butler Vappie, Esq, Interim Executive Director, Civilian Oversight Commission
Max Huntsman, Inspector General

Via Email

RE: LASD's continued brutalization of Black community members in the Antelope Valley

The whole country watched the footage by the brave bystander as Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) deputies once again used racist and violent policing tactics in the Antelope Valley, this time against an elderly Black family outside WinCo Foods in Lancaster on June 24, 2023. People across the region and the world have been expressing outrage after watching LASD Deputy Kirk manhandling, pepper spraying, and body slamming the ailing woman by her neck, while her partner called out that she has cancer. She has since struggled with crippling injuries, including fractured limbs, on top of her severe asthma and other serious health conditions.

On top of brutalizing this elderly Black family, deputies have been harassing the family, including by stationing LASD patrol cars outside their home. We've seen this before, and we continue to fight to stop and prevent LASD's harassment of impacted families. Cancel the Contract has been supporting the family, including by relocating them from the Antelope Valley in light of the harassment they have faced.

Cancel the Contract has also been supporting the Black mothers who were brutalized by LASD deputies and were separated from their babies in Palmdale in July 2022. The world watched, yet again, the video of an LASD deputy punching a Black mother in the face and head as she was holding her newborn for refusing to hand her child over to an agency that has a long history of harming Black community members. Last Wednesday, on July 12, an entire year later, Sheriff Robert Luna held a press conference to frame the incident and release an edited and shortened version of the body camera video footage. He continued the long tradition of law enforcement tactics of attempting to impugn the reputation of the victims and survivors in an effort to distract from the real issue of police misconduct and the utter lack of transparency and timely discipline.

Over the weekend, a letter was brought to our attention that is circulating around the department and appears to be ghost written by the Association of Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs

(ALADS), which has rallied support for the problem deputies in question. Notably, it is incredibly problematic that ABC7 reporter Leo Stallworth shared the letter in his Facebook account—without any context or seeking the positions of the impacted families and the broader community.¹ The anonymous letter, signed by “Just a Deputy,” condemns the dismissal of two deputies who brutalized and arrested the senior couple. This letter attempts to paint a picture of an understaffed and under-resourced department, and deputies suffering unwarranted discipline simply for doing their jobs. In addition, a GoFundMe titled “Justice for Deputy Timothy Gardner” has raised more than \$36,000 for the deputy dismissed for punching the Black mother in the face while trying to remove her infant, putting both the mother and child at risk.² The donations sign off with sentiments like “#thinbluelinefamily” and criticize Sheriff Luna’s decision to dismiss Deputy Gardner.

The letter from “Just a Deputy,” which purports to be authored by a deputy, is emblematic of LASD’s “us vs. them” mentality. LASD and ALADS have continuously prioritized the comfort and job security of its deputies over the safety and welfare of the community. ALADS has devoted extensive resources and effort into subverting voter-backed efforts and state legislation to gain oversight and accountability of LASD and government-initiated investigations. Time and time again, LASD deputies continue to cosign the violent and subversive acts of other members of their department, compromising the safety of the very people they committed to serve.

The letter could not be further from the truth and the grim reality of LASD’s occupying force in the Antelope Valley. LASD has had a long history of harassing and brutalizing the Antelope Valley community, including perpetuating violence against Black women, and in these cases a senior and a young mother. Both incidents are part of a long pattern of anti-Black racism in the Antelope Valley. After the Great Recession in 2008, families with Section 8 vouchers arrived to the Antelope Valley, the majority of whom were Black households headed by women with children. This influx of new residents spurred the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, LASD, and landlords to attempt to restrict the movement of Black and low-income persons into the region and to evict people who had already migrated. LASD was an active participant in enforcing this concerted effort and engaged in a campaign targeting Black voucher holders, subjecting them to unconstitutional searches, and referring voucher program violations for criminal prosecution. The U.S. Department of Justice sued LASD and the County of Los Angeles in 2015, ultimately entering into a consent decree that is still in effect and governs police practices in the Antelope Valley.

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https://m.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=817272039846311&id=100046905679454&set=a.320331942873659&source=57&refid=52&_tn_ =EH-R

² <https://www.gofundme.com/f/justice-for-deputy-timothy-gardner>.

Despite this consent decree, anti-poverty and racist animus remains pervasive among LASD deputies in the Antelope Valley. Reflecting this racist and adversarial culture, the Palmdale and Lancaster LASD stations are known to be strongholds for two racist and violent deputy gangs, the Rattlesnakes and the Cowboys. These stations, along with four other LASD stations known to be riddled with active deputy gangs, account for well over half of all LASD deputy shootings from 2016 to 2021.³ At the Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission's (COC) recent town hall in the Antelope Valley, multiple residents testified about the harassment and violence LASD deputies routinely subject them to. Multiple parents and teachers spoke about children being thrown to the ground by deputies in their schools. Deputies have targeted and displaced the Antelope Valley's growing and predominantly Black unhoused community. Additionally, according to the recent COC's report on tasers, the use of tasers in Lancaster nearly doubles that of any other LASD station, and Palmdale has the third most of any other station within LASD.

Furthermore, it's important to put things in perspective. According to a recent report from the ACLU SoCal and Catalyst California that takes a deep-dive into 2019 stop data that LASD reported to the California Department of Justice, it is clear that LASD's primary function is a massive traffic enforcement enterprise that has a disproportionate impact on communities of color.⁴ Most of deputy time in the field is spent on deputy-initiated stops (89 percent), rather than calls for service (11 percent), and the vast majority of deputy-initiated stops are for traffic violations (84 percent), traffic stops accounting for 79 percent of time spent conducting deputy-initiated stops. Most of these deputy-initiated stops are for non-serious reasons including minor infractions. In fact, they are tactics for trying to uncover evidence of other crime when there is no factual basis for believing that crime has occurred—that is, they are pretextual stops. Only two percent of all LASD stops involve suspected felonies, 97 percent of traffic stops recover no contraband, and less than one half of one percent of stops recover any weapons.

Yet, when community members have called LASD stations for assistance, they have been told they could not provide help because they were “defunded” and under-staffed—similar rhetoric as in the letter by “Just a Deputy.” In reality, LASD has a \$4 billion budget, and if there actually is a lack of deputies to respond to community members' requests, it is because deputies are too busy roaming the streets trying to find people to stop for minor violations or traffic infractions, as in the case of the Black mothers who were brutalized in a traffic stop. Costing nearly \$1 billion, LASD traffic stops have been a waste of precious county taxpayer resources—often as a failed pretextual strategy for finding more serious crime, divorced from any actual concern for public safety. And the harms to community members, including economic and non-

³ Center for Juvenile Law & Policy LMU Loyola Law School (CJLP), *50 Years of Deputy Gangs in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department*, 11 (2021).

⁴ https://www.aclusocal.org/sites/default/files/lasd_ripa_report_final.pdf

economic costs and physical and psychological harms, as in these recent incidents, have been significant.

As a result, these two recent incidents are not a symptom of an overworked department; rather, they are indicative of LASD's corrosive culture of violence and abuse that have given rise and have continued to enable deputy gangs, including the Rattlesnakes and Cowboys in the Lancaster and Palmdale LASD stations. These events are two examples of the many harms—and waste of precious taxpayer resources—that residents of the Antelope Valley have actively contended with for decades vis-à-vis the impunity surrounding LASD and the neglect of local and county government officials.

To end, we demand not only full independent investigations into the recent acts of LASD brutality inflicted on Black community members in Lancaster and Palmdale but also the termination of the deputies involved. More importantly, we need to overhaul the entire sheriff's department and its pervasive culture of brutality, secrecy, and impunity. Furthermore, the COC should immediately request the Board of Supervisors direct County Counsel to return to court in regards to the 2015 settlement agreement; the U.S. Department of Justice and Monitor Team have sought to return to court, but the County has been holding out.

Sincerely,

Black Lives Matter – Los Angeles
Cancel the Contract
Check the Sheriff
JusticeLA