



OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

HALL OF JUSTICE

ALEX VILLANUEVA, SHERIFF



February 16, 2022

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Supervisors:

OPEN CHALLENGE FOR ELECTED LEADERS TO IDENTIFY DEPUTY CLIQUE MEMBERS WHO YOU CAN SHOW ARE "GANG MEMBERS"

As the elected Sheriff of Los Angeles County, I demand you and other elected leaders, as well as your appointees, immediately cease and desist from using the derogatory term "deputy gangs" when referring to members of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (Department). This willful defamation of character has injured both individuals and the organization. It also serves no purpose other than to fuel hatred and increase the probability of assault and negative confrontations against our people.

My personnel routinely place themselves in harm's way while serving our community and ask nothing in return, other than a paycheck and maybe a little respect for the tough job they perform. Elected officials have no problem attending the funeral of a peace officer killed in the line of duty and often fight for the opportunity to speak at the podium, but the manner in which some have enthusiastically branded my personnel as "gang members" every opportunity they get is disgusting.

Utilizing the term "gang member" as a reference to members of the Department stems from the false allegations made in a frivolous lawsuit by a now discredited deputy sheriff. The ridiculous claims made by this individual and his attorneys were self-serving, as they increased his chances of receiving a large monetary settlement from Los Angeles County (County), and both the discredited plaintiff and his attorneys were sanctioned monetarily for their failure to comply with orders of the Court.

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The false and unproven allegations in this case alleging “deputy gangs” was used as the primary basis for attacks on the Department by some members of the Board of Supervisors¹ (Board), a former member of the Board (who has been federally indicted for 20 counts of public corruption), the Office of the Inspector General, the Civilian Oversight Commission, other elected officials, and the media. Their statements have been presented as “facts” in reports by RAND, the Center for Juvenile Law & Policy, and Knock LA. The Los Angeles Times alone has referenced these unsubstantiated allegations in at least a dozen articles. These writings have served to attack and undermine the perceived credibility and legitimacy of our organization, even though they were based on what we now know to be a highly unbelievable source.

On November 4, 2021, the case in question was dismissed due to *“lack of evidence and absence of triable facts.”* The Court also highlighted the complainant *“may not contradict his deposition testimony by proffering different testimony in a later declaration.”*

On January 14, 2022, the Court additionally stated this case *“was brought for reasons other than to remedy personal harm to the plaintiff. To further their mission, plaintiff and his attorneys came up with a series of unproven allegations, including claims about ... unusual misdemeanor arrests, illegal quota programs and actions involving other deputies.”*

As a sponsor of Assembly Bill 958, it is important for me to point out the specific term “deputy gangs” is not covered in California Penal Code Section 13670. The term also serves to line the pockets of attorneys who have created a “cottage industry” using the media attention gained through these attacks on the Department. At least one frivolous lawsuit actually quoted comments made on the record by the Board regarding “deputy gangs” in their pleading.²

Those who want to further undermine the perception of law enforcement use it as hate speech to promote their own agendas, such as defunding law enforcement and redirecting those funds to their own non-profit organizations, many of which are nothing more than sham corporations who operate with virtually zero accountability. Further use of the term will be evidence of your actual underlying intent, which appears to be a campaign to inflict harm upon the reputation of the Department and myself.

¹ Motion by Supervisors Sheila Kuehl and Hilda L. Solis, Assessing County Liability in Settlements Involving Sheriff “Gangs” (April 30, 2019), available at: <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/135078.pdf>.

²Civil Rights Complaint <https://scng-dash.digitalfirstmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Montano-Complaint-FILED.pdf>

As the first fluently Spanish speaking Latino Sheriff in over a hundred years, who supervises a majority Latino workforce, I hope you can see the blatant racial inferences your conscious bias displays every time you choose to attack our Department with this derogatory term.

It is extremely disheartening that this Board refused to acknowledge or take any corrective action when brought to your attention on November 17, 2021, in regard to the defamatory and slanderous statements from your appointee to the Civilian Oversight Commission, Chair Priscilla Ocen, for the following statements, *"We have a problem with white supremacy in the L.A. County Sheriff's Department. We have a problem with white supremacist gangs. We already knew that LASD has a culture of impunity. They lie, they cover up gangs and murders. LASD as a whole is operating as a gang."*

Similar to the lack of action with Commissioner Ocen's remarks, and very hypocritically, the silence from this Board was deafening when you chose to ignore the shockingly irresponsible and racially charged comments made by Supervisor Holly Mitchell during an online forum advertised as, *Exposing L.A. Sheriffs Gangs, Murders, & Harassment of Families*,³ on March 27, 2021. During this *Black Lives Matter - Los Angeles* sponsored forum (Attachment A), Supervisor Mitchell stated, among other things, *"Law enforcement, the district attorney's associations, and sheriff's associations of California... are clearly such white supremacist organizations."* These types of biased blanket statements by politicians make the day-to-day challenges peace officers face even more difficult and serve to undermine our ability to safely de-escalate dangerous situations in the field. Even though this Board has chosen to ignore her behavior, we continue to believe Supervisor Mitchell owes a heartfelt apology for her grossly irresponsible and racially charged defamation of our Department, which in fact contains all races, ethnicities, sexes, religions, and sexual identities.

At this same online anti-law enforcement forum, Supervisor Hilda Solis also appeared as a guest and spoke on the topic of "deputy gangs." During which she stated the Department has engaged in *"decades of historical discrimination and racism."* Then went on to say, *"The Sheriff's Department is a very violent organization, we know in many ways, retaliation and harassment."*

Interestingly, this *Exposing L.A. Sheriffs Gangs, Murders, & Harassment of Families* event was also recognized by another guest and speaker, Valarie Vargas, as additionally being sponsored by *Check the Sheriff*. The same organization which submitted a letter to the Board on February 7, 2022, requesting to *"create a procedure to allow impeachment and removal of the sheriff."* They stated their main reason for this was due to "deputy gangs." Not only have your words encouraged much of the

³ Facebook "Exposing L.A. Sheriffs Gangs, Murders, & Harassment of Families"
<https://www.facebook.com/blmla/videos/stop-la-sheriff-attacks-family-forum/347471413335304/>

disinformation, but two Board members have actively participated in these activists' political events.

I openly challenge every elected leader, or their appointees, to provide facts to me and name individuals who they can prove are "gang members," as defined by California Penal Code Section 13670, and subject yourself to defamation laws if wrong. Using this term as a blanket statement is political cowardice and opportunistic pandering.

Should you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alex Villanueva', with a stylized flourish at the end.

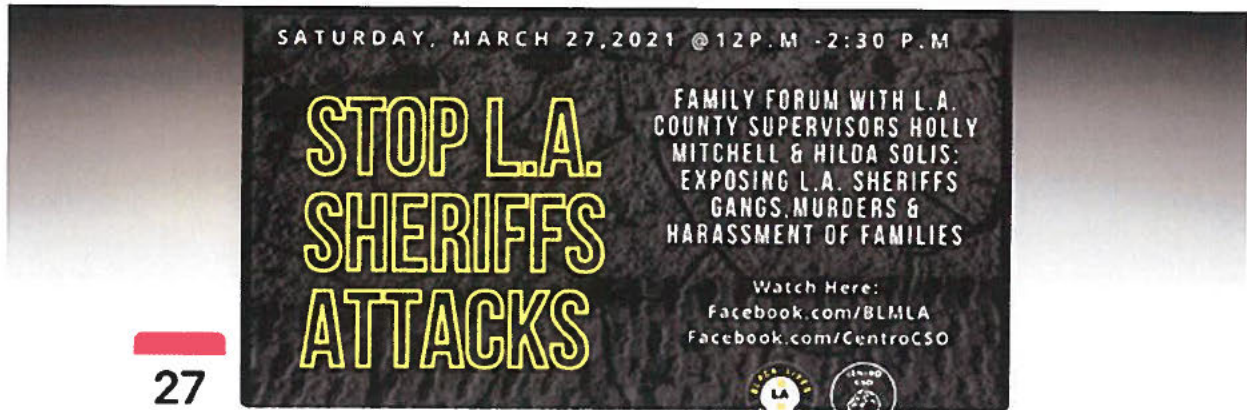
ALEX VILLANUEVA
SHERIFF

AV:JLS:ac
(Office of the Sheriff)

- c: Brian K. Williams, Executive Director, Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission
Tab Rhodes, Professional Peace Officers Association
James Wheeler, President, Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs
Cesar Romero, President, Los Angeles Sheriff's Professional Association

ATTACHMENT - A

OPEN CHALLENGE OF ELECTED LEADERS TO IDENTIFY DEPUTY CLIQUE MEMBERS WHO YOU CAN SHOW ARE "GANG MEMBERS"



TODAY AT 12 PM PDT

Stop LA Sheriff's Attacks Forum Mar 27 @12 PM

Free · Facebook Live

Starting Soon

The Live Video Hasn't Started
You'll be able to watch the live video when the event host goes live.

About Discussion

Interested Going Invite

Details

102 people responded

Hosts

Black Lives Matter Los Angeles Message

<https://www.facebook.com/blmla/videos/stop-la-sheriff-attacks-family-forum/347471413335304/>