

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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September 3, 2020

The Honorable Eric S. Dreiband
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Assistant Attorney General Dreiband:

The Subcommittee is writing to request that the Department of Justice investigate the actions of a violent contingent of deputies at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) who adhere to white supremacist ideologies, belong to "criminal gangs," and engage in an "aggressive style of policing" motivated by racism.¹ The LASD has been unable to curb the behavior of this subgroup of deputies despite allegations that they have instituted illegal arrest quotas, retaliated against other employees, and celebrated police shootings of civilians.²

There is a long history of white supremacist gang infiltration in the ranks of LASD, dating from 1971.³ Throughout the 1980s, these gangs proliferated throughout the LASD "at overwhelmingly white sheriff's stations that were islands in Black and Latino immigrant communities."⁴ They have been characterized as "powerful forces with the sheriff's department who beat and harass local residents and, at times, actively work to intimidate other nonaffiliated officers."⁵

¹ *L.A. County Deputy Alleges "Executioner" Gang Dominates Compton Sheriff Station*, Los Angeles Times (July 30, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-30/sheriff-clique-compton-station-executioners).

² *Deputies Accused of Being in Secret Cost L.A. County Taxpayers \$55 Million, Records Show*, Los Angeles Times (Aug. 4, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-08-04/sheriff-deputy-clique-payouts).

³ *The Secret Society Among Lawmen*, Los Angeles Times (Mar. 24, 1999) (online at www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-10-12-me-107-story.html).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *A New Lawsuit Describes a Violent Gang in L.A. County. Its Members Are Deputy Sheriffs*, Vox (Oct. 11, 2019) (online at www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/11/20910315/banditos-los-angeles-sheriff-department-lawsuit-gangs).

Some gang members sport tattoos of a skull with Nazi imagery and an AK-47, and deputies are rewarded with “inking parties” and additional tattoos after they prove their loyalty by breaking the law or violating LASD protocol, often by committing acts of police brutality or being involved in a shooting.⁶ Not surprisingly, gang members have been implicated in heinous acts of brutality against Black people.⁷ Los Angeles County has paid out “roughly \$55 million in settlements” in nearly 60 cases related to these gang-affiliated deputies and their violations of civil rights.⁸

In 1991, a federal judge handling a class-action civil rights lawsuit against Los Angeles County found that the so-called Lynwood Vikings operated as a “neo-Nazi, white supremacist gang” and described deputies as operating with “racially motivated hostility.”⁹

Nearly 30 years later, these gangs continue to attract younger deputies entering the LASD.¹⁰ A recent lawsuit filed by a former deputy in the LASD Compton station alleges a pattern of retaliatory behavior by one criminal gang known as the Executioners.¹¹ The lawsuit claims that the Executioners recruit deputies based on their use of violence against criminal suspects and fellow deputies and that the overwhelming majority of its members have been involved in shootings.¹²

This week, the parents of 18-year-old Andres Guardado—who was fatally shot by two officers from the Compton station in June—filed a wrongful death lawsuit alleging unnecessary force and lack of oversight, and sought to link the officers to the Executioners, after another Compton deputy recently identified them both as gang members during a deposition.¹³

⁶ *Id.*; *L.A. County Deputy Alleges “Executioner” Gang Dominates Compton Sheriff Station*, Los Angeles Times (July 30, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-30/sheriff-clique-compton-station-executioners).

⁷ *Claims of Racism and Brutality Dog Los Angeles County Sheriff “Deputy Gangs,”* The Appeal (Sept. 28, 2018) (online at theappeal.org/claims-of-racism-brutality-dog-los-angeles-county-sheriff-deputy-gangs/).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Deputies in “Neo-Nazi Gang,” Judge Found: Many at Lynwood Office Have Engaged in Racially Motivated Violence Against Blacks and Latinos, Jurist Wrote*, Los Angeles Times (Oct. 12, 1991) (online at www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-10-12-me-107-story.html).

¹⁰ *The Secret Society Among Lawmen*, Los Angeles Times (Mar. 24, 1999) (online at www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-10-12-me-107-story.html).

¹¹ *Deputy Gang with Matching Tattoos Rules Compton Patrol Station, LASD Deputy Alleges*, ABC-7 (July 31, 2020) (online at <https://abc7.com/lasd-executioners-deputy-gang-sheriff-alex-villanueva-art-gonzalez/6343979/>).

¹² *LASD Has Been “Permeated” by a Violent Deputy Gang with Matching Tattoos Called the “Executioners,”* Fox News (Aug. 3, 2020) (online at www.foxnews.com/us/lasd-has-been-permeated-by-a-violent-deputy-gang-with-matching-tattoos-called-the-executioners).

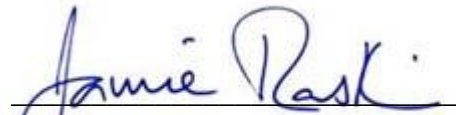
¹³ *Family of Andres Guardado Sues Sheriff’s Department, Deputies Involved in Fatal Shooting*, Los Angeles Times (Sept. 1, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-09-01/andres-guardado-fatal-shooting-sheriffs-deputies-lawsuit).

A separate lawsuit alleges that another gang, the Banditos, operates within LASD's East Los Angeles Station.¹⁴ The lawsuit claims that the Banditos hold a "stranglehold" on the surrounding communities through a "reign of unlawful policing, violence, and intimidation."¹⁵

The allegations of abusive behavior by these criminal gangs within the LASD are deeply disturbing. If true, they represent egregious violations of the civil rights of the residents of the communities subjected to their violence and to the deputies who oppose these heinous practices.

The Civil Rights Division should investigate these allegations of systemic abuses. We request that your office immediately open an investigation into the LASD to determine whether the civil rights of the public and other LASD employees have been violated. The rule of law cannot abide such lawless behavior from the men and women sworn to protect our communities.

Sincerely,



Jamie Raskin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and
Civil Liberties



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and
Civil Liberties

cc: The Honorable Chip Roy, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

¹⁴ *A New LawsUIT Describes a Violent Gang in L.A. County. Its Members Are Deputy Sheriffs*, Vox (Oct. 11, 2019) (online at www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/11/20910315/banditos-los-angeles-sheriff-department-lawsuit-gangs).

¹⁵ *New LawsUIT Focuses on Alleged L.A. County Deputy "Gangs,"* The Appeal (Oct. 10, 2019) (online at <https://theappeal.org/deputy-gangs-los-angeles-banditos/>).