

June 17, 2021

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor Hilda Solis
Supervisor Holly Mitchell
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

Via E-Mail

Re: Villanueva Out Of Venice and the County's Responsibility To Hold Him Accountable

To the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

This Countywide coalition, composed of over 100 organizations and leaders in housing justice, criminal justice advocacy, decriminalization of poverty, and civil liberties, is adamantly opposed to the presence of Sheriff Alex Villanueva and his department on the Venice Boardwalk. The Sheriff's department is overstepping the County's jurisdiction and causing imminent harm to the most vulnerable residents of the City of Los Angeles. This is an extraordinary misuse of County resources and is directly contrary to the County's Decriminalization Policy, which mandates the decriminalization of homelessness.¹ We urge the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) to fully exercise its budgetary authority by removing funding from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's (LASD) Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) program and to do all in its power to stop the Sheriff's plans for mass forced displacement and criminalization of Venice Boardwalk residents.

Villanueva has unilaterally involved the County of Los Angeles in the criminalization of homelessness within the City of Los Angeles and made the Venice Boardwalk his target. He has done so without coordination or approval from other leaders, including City elected officials, the Board, homeless service organizations, and community-based service providers. The sheriff has no experience in addressing homelessness or connection to the systems that are in place to support people in exiting homelessness. Not only does Villanueva lack the necessary expertise, he continuously promotes stereotypes, myths, and misinformation, such as recklessly attributing the homicide rate to the presence of homeless encampments and villainizing the unhoused community for "destroying our economy and way of life."² Villanueva's presence and approach to the homelessness crisis is not about addressing root causes; rather, it is about upholding the continued effort to criminalize poverty in Los Angeles. This is confirmed by the revelation that the Sheriff coordinated with the Los Angeles Police Department to set aside 2,000 custody beds that can be used as a 48-hour hold for when unhoused residents are deemed "non-compliant."³ It can be assumed that given the scarcity of housing resources, especially in permanent housing, and the fact that the Sheriff has no ongoing connection with the County's housing system, that over 200 residents could be incarcerated. Criminalization and forced displacement have been proven to be failed policies that perpetuate and reinforce inequities across our communities. Pete White, executive director of LACAN, states:

"Sheriff Villanueva's incursion into the housing crisis should not be a shock nor a surprise. However, his political stunt will have a lasting effect on those looking for a reason to banish poor and homeless people from communities they call home. The sheriff's actions makes

¹ Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, "Approved Strategies to Combat Homelessness," Strategy E5, Decriminalization Policy, at p. 76. <https://homeless.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/HI-Report-Approved2.pdf>

² Bruce Buffer It's Time! Podcast with LA County Sheriff Alex Villanueva <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7hxKWxc9Bc>

³ Knock LA <https://twitter.com/cerisecastle/status/1404661017288658949>

criminals out of those simply too poor to afford housing or that have been systemically locked out of opportunities. He assists in building a narrative that favors expensive carceral shelters over permanent housing, leaving those currently without housing little hope in securing a place to call their own.”

For decades, LASD has been rife with corruption, abuse of power, and impunity. LASD shootings and killings increased under Sheriff Villanueva, including a 45 percent increase in shootings in 2020 compared to 2018.⁴ According to a recent Loyola Law School report, these increased shootings and killings have a strong connection with the crisis of deputy gangs--which Villanueva has actively enabled and exacerbated.⁵ For example, analyzing LASD shootings in the five years between November 2015 and November 2020, the report found a strong correlation between the number of shootings committed by deputies of a station and the existence of deputy gangs at that station, “buttress[ing] the conclusion that deputy gangs escalate uses of force.”⁶ Since the murder of George Floyd, LASD has killed at least 18 community members, all but two individuals Black and Latinx folks in South L.A., East L.A., and the Antelope Valley--areas with LASD stations that are riddled with deputy gangs.

We must address the Sheriff’s presence in Venice seriously and urgently. Villanueva has consistently resisted and obstructed the systems of checks and balances designed to provide oversight and supervision of LASD. It is clear that the sheriff’s focus on targeting unhoused people in Venice is in great part an effort to distract from ongoing scandals including deputy gangs, his abuse of power and violations of the law, LASD’s harassment of families of community members deputies have killed, and LASD’s coverup of the murder of Andres Guardado.⁷ Ivette Ale, Senior Policy Lead with Dignity and Power Now states:

“Despite the Sheriff’s murder of Black and Brown people, his corruption, misogynist attacks on our only Latina Board member, slandering of the county’s Chief Executive Officer, doxing and violent attacks on protestors and the media, and escalating displacement of our most vulnerable residents in Venice, his budget remains untouched. The Sheriff’s Department’s budget is over \$3 billion -- billions that should be used to house and care for our residents. This budget does not reflect our values, does not reflect the Board’s care first vision, and enables a rogue Sheriff and a historically murderous department. The Board of Supervisors has the power to hold Sheriff Villanueva and his department accountable through the budget. The community has stood behind the Board’s efforts for accountability and will continue to stand behind them if and when they take action to disarm Villanueva through the budget.”

We are calling on the Board to take action by removing funding from LASD’s HOST program. The Board has the ability to hold Sheriff Villanueva accountable and to ensure he does not overstep the County’s jurisdiction through the control of the Sheriff’s budget. LASD has never been nor will they ever be

⁴ See Office of Inspector Gen., Cnty. Los Angeles, Reform and Oversight Efforts: Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department: October to December 2020, 14, <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/154454.pdf>.

⁵ 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).

⁶ *Id.* at 33.

⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Max Huntsman, Inspector Gen., to L.A. Cnty. Civilian Oversight Comm’n re: Report Back on Unlawful Conduct of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Dec. 14, 2020, https://oig.lacounty.gov/Portals/OIG/Reports/UnlawfulConductOfLASD.pdf?ver=m_s7zzvyXR6DSbMsR9AEw%3d%3d; Nat’l Lawyers Guild & ACLU, No Justice, No Peace: The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department’s Targeted Harassment of Grieving Families (May 2020), <https://www.checkthesherrif.com/reports>; Motion by Supervisors Holly J. Mitchell and Hilda L. Solis, Increasing Transparency Through Access to Peace Officer Records (May 18, 2020), <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/158358.pdf>; Aida Chavez, *After Killing 18-year-old Andres Guardado LA Protesters Struggle Against the Limits of Police Reform*, The Intercept (June 25, 2020), <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/25/andres-guardado-los-angeles-police/>.

equipped or have the responsibility to deliver services ensuring the health and welfare of LA's unhoused community. And they have absolutely no role in doing so within the borders of the City of Los Angeles. Continuing to fund programs like HOST, which the Sheriff is using to justify the targeting of the City's most vulnerable residents, only serves to empower a failed department while depleting precious resources that should be reinvested in funding community-based services, which are the real experts and are more cost-effective. Instead, it is critical that Los Angeles County provides relief to the 50,000⁸ unsheltered Angelenos.

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SHERIFF**

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**SERVICES
NOT SWEEPS**

[CheckTheSheriff.com](https://www.checkthesheriff.com)

[JusticeLANow.org](https://www.justicelanow.org)

[ServicesNotSweeps.com](https://www.servicesnotsweeps.com)

⁸ LAHSA 2021 Homeless Count

<https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=4692-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-total-point-in-time-homeless-population-by-geographic-areas>