

JUSTICELA

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JusticeLA Statement in response to Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's Targeted Harassment of Journalists and Families

For decades the community has voiced outrage at the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's (LASD) continued repression of the First Amendment rights of protesters and journalists. The department brutalized [NPR reporter Josie Huang](#). Alex Villanueva personally threatened to arrest Spectrum News reporter [Kate Cagle](#), and ran campaign ads targeting a [private citizen](#) to incite violence—using their face and name in accusations that he is a “paid activist Marxist.” Villanueva also ran a surrealist campaign ad calling LA Times publishers “white Marxist racists,” telling the paper to “#S@!% Your Endorsement,” ironically after he completed an endorsement interview where he accused LA County Inspector General Max Huntsman of being a [holocaust denier](#).

This week, the LASD amped-up their targeting of journalists. At Villanueva's own press conference, he threatened LA Times journalist Alene Tchekmedyan with a criminal investigation due to her coverage of a [security video](#) showing a deputy kneeling on the head of a handcuffed incarcerated person for three minutes. Villanueva stated that he had no knowledge of the video's existence, but reporters at KnockLA [refuted this claim](#).

Villanueva referred to Alene Tchekmedyan's coverage as an “obstruction of justice.” In a response from the LA Times [legal counsel](#), “You are on notice that if the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department attempts to search the property or data of Ms. Tchekmedyan or any other L.A. Times employee in this matter, the department will have directly violated the PPA and clearly established constitutional law and L.A. Times will seek every available remedy against you, the department, and every individual official involved in any such unlawful conduct.”

These incidents are not isolated actions of one rogue officer; rather, they reflect a coordinated effort to publicly attack, physically harass, and in the worst cases murder residents who speak out against the department's misconduct—the very constituents which the department has been allocated \$3.6 billion dollars to protect and serve. Indeed, the way LASD and Sheriff Villanueva respond to vocal critics and reporters reveals a worrisome intention to delegitimize and forcefully silence any opposition to the department's history of obstructing justice. LASD has a multi-million dollar public relations budget deployed to manipulate the narratives about the department's actions — all paid by our tax dollars. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is closely examining their police department's public relations budget and it is time for Los Angeles county to do the same.

LASD's tactics of intimidation extend well beyond their public relations machine. There are [18 reported deputy gangs](#) within the LASD and an [investigative unit known](#) for its targeting of public critics of the

department. On an almost daily basis, [LASD intimidates and harasses the families](#) of those who have been killed by deputies. The county cannot continue to look away from this egregious, long-standing abuse of power. We call on the Board of Supervisors and County CEO to address the blatant lack of intra-department accountability within LASD by significantly reducing their public relations budget in the 2022-2023 budget, and take any and all accountability measures within their power. Public funding should not be used to intimidate, harass, and threaten the lives of reporters and community members. County action to hold LASD accountable is long overdue.

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About the JusticeLA Coalition:

JusticeLA is a partnership of grassroots organizations, advocates, directly impacted communities, and stakeholders to reduce the footprint of incarceration by stopping jail expansion and reclaiming, reimagining and reinvesting dollars away from incarceration and into community-based systems of care.