



FOR ALL INCARCERATED PEOPLE, THEIR FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

Tanaka's Conviction is Not the End, It's a Beginning

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Los Angeles, CA – The conviction of former Undersheriff Paul Tanaka for charges of obstruction of justice marks an important moment in the history of violence and brutality that has characterized the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department for decades. The conviction of the second most powerful official who brutally ran the largest jail system in the world is a historical victory not only for those who have been incarcerated in the county jails and for their loved ones, but for everyone who desires an end to state violence. However, Paul Tanaka's conviction should not turn the page on corruption and misconduct in the Sheriff's Department – instead it should continue to inform how the current sheriff, the county supervisors, and the yet to be functional Civilian Oversight Commission should pursue justice and transparency in the department.

Dignity and Power Now and the Coalition to End Sheriff Violence spent three years fighting for and winning a civilian oversight commission to ensure that all those involved in jail operations in the post Tanaka and Baca era of the department uphold the human rights of our incarcerated loved ones. An enduring act of justice for Black and Brown Los Angeles residents, who make up the majority of the jail population, will require the reforms that have been won in the last three years to result in longterm changes for the department. While Tanaka's conviction today is historic, the Los Angeles County Jail system has seen a 40% increase in use of force in 2015. Sheriff McDonald has made strides to discipline officers for dishonesty and misconduct but even he has found resistance in making his decisions stick. Empowering the Civilian Oversight Commission of the sheriff's department with subpoena power will give the commission the legal reach and access it needs to continue to shed light on the conditions inside the jails is necessary to ensure that Tanaka's conviction is part of a meaningful trajectory towards.

“Dignity and Power Now and the Coalition to End Sheriff Violence call on the supervisors to ensure that the commissioners appointed to sit on the commission are representative of the community,” says Mark-Anthony Johnson, Director of Wellness at Dignity and Power Now, “including those who have been incarcerated and have known long before the Department of Justice the intricacies of sheriff violence and misconduct.”

Sandra Neal, a Coalition to End Sheriff Violence member, says the news about Tanaka today brought her to tears, “Five years after my son was brutally beaten by deputies, I get to hear the news that the ringleaders Tanaka and Baca are finally being held liable for their corruption and illegal actions. This is a small bit of justice for my son, family, and the many affected families in our community.” Sandra continues, “I can only hope that the removal of two of the leaders responsible for giving the green light to use excessive and deadly force will be a stepping stone in the changes necessary to create a more transparent and accountable Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.”

For more information, please visit dignityandpowernow.org.