

Baca's Mistrial and Unaccountability are at the Root of State Violence

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Los Angeles, CA – A year of multiple court date postponements, a plea deal denied by the judge, and a spontaneous formulation of Alzheimer's Disease have amounted to former LA County Sheriff Lee Baca's ending in a mistrial. While the trial focused on whether Baca intentionally obstructed justice by interfering with an FBI investigation, some may overlook why the FBI was doing an investigation within the jails in the first place – to investigate allegations of deputies abusing Black and Brown prisoners.

Dignity and Power Now and the 30 community organizations that make up its Coalition to End Sheriff Violence believe that Baca should be held accountable for what has been deemed by the ACLU "a sick culture of deputy-on-inmate hyperviolence." That culture festered and was kept secret by LASD personnel including Sheriff Baca himself. The Los Angeles County Supervisors have just approved the long-awaited Civilian Oversight Commission to advise the LASD, but the Coalition to End Sheriff Violence says its lacking the subpoena power needed to inform the community, hold deputies accountable, and keep that culture at bay indefinitely. Baca's trial comes in the wake of an ACLU class action lawsuit for civil rights violations, a Department of Justice probe into inhumane treatment of people with mental health disabilities, and a blue ribbon commission that implicated every level of leadership when it uncovered a long standing pattern of violence against incarcerated people. Additionally, community organizations are concerned that the Supervisors appointed a former LASD deputy to the commission, creating what they say is an obvious conflict of interest. The coalition is continuing to campaign for a commission with more power and access while ensuring that those who have been incarcerated and have experienced sheriff violence lead the process.

Patrisse Cullors, Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter and Founder of Dignity and Power Now, became a central figure in law enforcement accountability when she took action after her brother was beaten unconscious by Lee Baca's deputies in a Los Angeles County jail. "Over three years, while allowing torturous violations of our loved one's human rights in his jails, Sheriff Baca told myself and our coalition members personally that his department was being held to the gold standard of oversight." Patrisse continues, "Until law enforcement leaders are held accountable for unmistakable violations against our loved ones, a system that thrives on the exploitation of Black and Brown people will continue unchecked."

"Justice is effective and powerful civilian oversight, moving public funds from incarceration to building strong communities, and ensuring that formerly incarcerated people are at the forefront of leveraging transparency and accountability in a department that has long avoided it," says Mark-Anthony Johnson, Health and Wellness Director at Dignity and Power Now. "Our goal isn't punishment or retaliation," Mark-Anthony continues, "It is to hold those that allow violence and human rights violations accountable so that Black and Brown communities no longer have to suffer."