

Former Law Enforcement on LASD Civilian Oversight Commission a Conflict of Interest

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Los Angeles, C.A. – Six months ago the working group responsible for giving recommendations on the Civilian Oversight Commission’s size, scope, powers, and structure presented their report to the Board of Supervisors and recommended that no former or current Los Angeles County Sheriff Department employees and no current employees of other departments should be able to serve on the commission. This recommendation was decided after a six-month deliberation process which included nine public town hall meetings and testimony from hundreds of community members. The question for Tuesday is, why are the supervisors motioning that former law enforcement, including LASD, be able to serve on the commission?

The Coalition to End Sheriff Violence in Los Angeles Jails, the group of organizations who have been fighting for over three years for independent oversight and who have participated in the entire working group process, say that in order for this commission to have credibility amongst community members it must be reflective of those most impacted. They point to the inclusion of former law enforcement as a blatant conflict of interest but acknowledge the value they can have in other realms. There are multiple avenues for law enforcement to take place in the oversight process including the sheriff department’s Internal Investigations Division, the new Constitutional Policing Advisor to be hired by the department, and the Office of the Inspector General. “Law enforcement should be directed to improved efficacy and quality of these entities. Any role of law enforcement on the commission should be advisory,” says Dignity and Power Now Health and Wellness Director Mark-Anthony Johnson.

In addition to preserving the Civilian Oversight Commission as purely civilian, community organizations want to strengthen and make permanent community involvement in the selection process. They say removal of community from the process undermines the underlying spirit and drive of why the commission was created to begin with and defies other successful civilian commission’s standards from all over the country. The sheriff has expressed that the department is waiting for the commission to be established to see who is appointed before clearly defining its powers and avenues, which signals that there is an interest in weakening the commission if it is perceived as not in the department’s favor.

“We are in a historical moment where law enforcement across the country have been exposed for corruption and misconduct within their ranks,” Mark-Anthony continues. “Given the length of both Paul Tanaka and Former Sheriff Baca’s leadership in the department – stretching back at least 10 years – allowing former officers to sit on this *civilian* commission would gravely undermine its mission, credibility, and effectiveness to end the violence the department has generated for over a decade.”