

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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February 1, 2022

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Kristen Clarke
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland and Assistant Attorney General Clarke:

We write to renew the Subcommittee’s September 3, 2020, request we previously made of the Trump Administration for the Department of Justice (DOJ) to conduct a full investigation into the actions of violent contingents of deputies at the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department (LASD) who may have violated federal civil rights laws by engaging in race-based policing. Specifically, the Subcommittee asked DOJ to investigate “allegations of systemic abuses” by “criminal gangs” operating within LASD, including illegal arrest quotas; the celebration of police shootings of civilians; an “aggressive style of policing” motivated by racism; and intimidation or retaliation against LASD employees who raise concerns about the gangs.¹

The Subcommittee never received a response to its request from the previous Administration. In January 2021, the California Department of Justice launched a civil rights investigation to determine whether LASD has engaged in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional policing.² That development only underscores the need for a full-scale federal investigation, especially considering DOJ’s 2015 settlement agreement with LASD following an investigation that found patterns of “excessive use of force, biased policing practices,” and “unlawful searches and seizures.”³

¹ Letter from Chairman Jamie Raskin, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, to Assistant Attorney General Eric S. Dreiband, Department of Justice (Sept. 3, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2020-09-03.%20JR%20JG%20to%20Dreiband%20re%20LASD%20Gangs.pdf>); *see also* *L.A. County Deputy Alleges “Executioner” Gang Dominates Compton Sheriff Station*, Los Angeles Times (July 30, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-30/sheriff-clique-compton-station-executioners).

² Office of the California Attorney General, *Attorney General Becerra Launches Civil Rights Investigation of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department* (Jan. 22, 2021) (online at <https://oag.ca.gov/news/press-releases/attorney-general-becerra-launches-civil-rights-investigation-los-angeles-county>).

³ Department of Justice, *Justice Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department Agree to Policing Reforms and Settlement of Police-Related Fair Housing Claims in the Antelope Valley* (Apr. 28, 2015)

As noted in our September 2020 letter, LASD has a troubled, decades-long history involving unauthorized, exclusive, and secretive gangs comprised of sworn deputies operating within the Department.⁴ As far back as 1971, a secret gang called the “Little Devils” operated in LASD’s East Los Angeles station, beginning a pattern of gang proliferation “at overwhelmingly white sheriff’s stations that were islands in Black and Latino immigrant communities.”⁵ There are troubling reports of members of these LASD gangs being involved in instances of brutality against Black people; celebrating deputy-involved shootings; and rewarding other members for breaking the law or violating LASD protocol.⁶ Numerous lawsuits have accused gang-affiliated deputies of engaging in racially discriminatory misconduct at county jails, including shouting racial slurs at detainees while assaulting them.⁷

Fifty years after the first reported deputy gang, the violent, lawless conduct of the members of these gangs has led to investigations, lawsuits, and nearly \$55 million in settlements against Los Angeles County to resolve allegations of excessive use of force, violence, and intimidation by LASD employees as well as members of the community.⁸ A recent study by the RAND Corporation found that of that total, \$21 million came in the last decade alone.⁹

Another report by the Loyola Law School Center for Juvenile Law and Policy found a disturbing correlation between the presence of deputy gangs and escalating uses of force. According to the report, there have been 133 deputy-involved shootings from November 2015 to November 2020, approximately 80% of which involved Black or Latino civilians. Of the 13

(online at www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-and-los-angeles-county-sheriffs-department-agree-policing-reforms-and)

⁴ Letter from Chairman Jamie Raskin, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, to Assistant Attorney General Eric S. Dreiband, Department of Justice (Sept. 3, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2020-09-03.%20JR%20JG%20to%20Dreiband%20re%20LASD%20Gangs.pdf>).

⁵ *The Secret Society Among Lawmen*, Los Angeles Times (Mar. 24, 1999) (online at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-mar-24-mn-20461-story.html>); see also *Lie and Deny: Secrecy and Suspicion Surround the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department*, Newsweek (Apr. 21, 2016) (online at www.newsweek.com/los-angeles-county-sheriffs-department-mitrice-richardson-secrecy-suspicion-450421).

⁶ *L.A. County Deputy Alleges “Executioner” Gang Dominates Compton Sheriff Station*, Los Angeles Times (July 30, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-30/sheriff-clique-compton-station-executioners); *Claims of Racism and Brutality Dog Los Angeles County Sheriff “Deputy Gangs,”* The Appeal (Sept. 28, 2018) (online at theappeal.org/claims-of-racism-brutality-dog-los-angeles-county-sheriff-deputy-gangs/).

⁷ *Claims of Racism and Brutality Dog Los Angeles County Sheriff “Deputy Gangs,”* The Appeal (Sept. 28, 2018) (online at theappeal.org/claims-of-racism-brutality-dog-los-angeles-county-sheriff-deputy-gangs/); First Amended Complaint (2012), *Rosas v. Baca*, C.D. Cal. (2:12-cv-00428 DDP) (online at www.clearinghouse.net/chDocs/public/JC-CA-0073-0004.pdf).

⁸ *A New LawsUIT Describes a Violent Gang in L.A. County. Its Members Are Deputy Sheriffs*, Vox (Oct. 11, 2019) (online at www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/11/20910315/banditos-los-angeles-sheriff-department-lawsuit-gangs); *Secret Gangs of Sheriff’s Deputies Cost L.A. County Millions*, Los Angeleno (Aug. 7, 2020) (online at <https://losangeleno.com/features/secret-lasd-gangs-cost-county-millions/>).

⁹ Samuel Peterson et al., *Understanding Subgroups Within the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department*, RAND Corporation (2021) (online at www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA616-1.html).

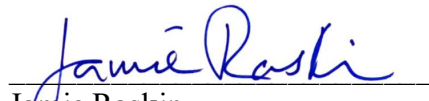
patrol stations with more than two deputy-involved shootings in that time frame, six stations accounted for well over half, and each of them had an “active deputy gang, as well as a history of complaints, reporting, and lawsuits alleging deputy gang misconduct.”¹⁰

According to this report, LASD deputy gangs typically originate in low-income areas populated by racial minorities, and the people of color living within the gang’s “turf” are subjected to “an inordinate amount of heavy-handed, aggressive policing, including racial profiling and excessive use of force.” These civil rights violations are enabled by “extreme loyalty and a strict code of silence” among deputy gang members.¹¹ The failure to address these deputy gangs not only undermines the safety and trust of the people they are sworn to protect—especially those of color—but also threatens equal justice under the law.


It is imperative that the DOJ launch an independent investigation into the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department to determine whether the conduct of these deputy gangs violates the civil rights of the public or other LASD employees. As we previously requested, the Civil Rights Division must conduct a full-scale, public investigation to ensure that the largest sheriff’s department in the country operates in a manner that upholds and respects federal civil rights laws.

We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Jamie Raskin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and
Civil Liberties



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Nancy Mace, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

¹⁰ Loyola Law School, Center for Juvenile Law & Policy, *50 Years of Deputy Gangs in the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department* (Jan. 2021) (online at <https://lmu.app.box.com/s/ho3rp9qdbmn9aip8fy8dmmukjjgw5yyc>).

¹¹ *Id.*