

Sheriff Jim McDonnell Announces Plan Before Civilian Oversight Commission; Issues of Tattoos, Alleged Subgroup Cultures

Today, Thursday July 26, 2018, Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell addressed the Sheriff's Civilian Oversight Commission (COC) and extended an invitation to join the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in a "comprehensive study of the issue of tattoos and the Department and subgroup cultures."

In the statement he made before the Commission, Sheriff McDonnell said, "At the end of the day, everyone, most importantly our public, should be confident that there are no "gangs" of deputies operating subversively anywhere within the Department,"

Here is Sheriff Jim McDonnell's full statement before the Sheriff's Civilian Oversight Commission:

"Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to address this issue.

During a recent deposition of one of our deputies, I recognized that revelations were brought to light that have renewed interest in tattoos, and their potential relationship to deputy subgroups. We understand and we share the public's concern and are looking into all aspects of this issue. While I can't discuss the specifics of that investigation, I would like to provide some big-picture perspective of what I know, and what I intend to find out about this troubling issue.

These kinds of disturbing allegations about deputy cliques have been raised periodically about the Sheriff's Department for many years. As you know, I served on the Citizen's Commission on Jail Violence. That body uncovered similar allegations in 2012 about deputies in Patrol Stations, and also in Custody.

But the problem and the perception go back much further.

The Kolts Report in 1992 raised allegations about the existence of subgroups of deputies engaged in unprofessional or improper conduct. Other allegations date back to the 1970s.

However, despite all this, no one has undertaken a serious, comprehensive study of the issue. I intend, on my watch, to get to the bottom of it.

The Sheriff's Department is partnering with County Counsel and the Inspector General, and I invite the unions and this esteemed body to join with us as well to bring in outside experts and establish exactly what we're dealing with here.

This will be a serious study of the Department and its subgroup cultures. Our goal is to understand exactly what we're dealing with, then come up with the best thinking on how to resolve these long-standing concerns.

At the end of the day, everyone, most importantly our public, should be confident that there are no "gangs" of deputies operating subversively anywhere within the Department.

This effort will run concurrently with the administrative effort now underway. To the extent these groups currently exist, and there is evidence some do,

What is their purpose?
What behavior is associated with being a member?
Are they “secret” or exclusive?
Do they require certain conduct to become a member?
Do they condone improper behavior?

I am not going to pre-judge the outcome of our comprehensive study. But I will say this: renegade cliques erode public confidence as well as internal morale, and they will not be tolerated within the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. Thank you.”

Sheriff Jim McDonnell

Prior to his election as Los Angeles County Sheriff in November 2014, Jim McDonnell was an early advocate for a Sheriff’s Civilian Oversight Commission (COC) which serves as a valuable bridge to the diverse communities of Los Angeles County. Appointed by the Board of Supervisors, the COC commissioners work in an advisory capacity and bring a wealth of experience and perspectives to the major law enforcement issues that impact the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and our public.