

This document is an extract of a larger publication.

civilgrandjury.org is a project of UnGovr.org, a US-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to government transparency and public accountability.



POLICE RIDE-ALONG



**Alice Beener
Dorothy Brown
Ronnie Dann-Honor
Gerard Duiker
Marilyn Gelfand
Thomas Kearney
Patrick Lyons
Shelley Strohm**

POLICE RIDE-ALONG

I SUMMARY

The Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) heard consistent statements from a number of speakers regarding the social conditions associated with those members of the public touched by the justice system. These include socio-economic conditions leaving people without opportunity to actively participate in our economy, mental illness that incapacitates people and prevents them from participating within society, and drug addiction that can lead to a life of crime. In an effort to improve the criminal justice system, the County of Los Angeles (the County) has focused its attention on treatment and diversion programs.

The shift to treatment and diversion requires a paradigm shift within the policing communities and integration of policing, health, and other supportive services. We were informed by leaders of several police and health organizations of positive developments, such as the deployment of Mental Health Evaluation Teams (MET) within police departments. These conversations led the CGJ to want a better understanding of what police officers and sheriff deputies see and deal with on a daily basis. Four police ride-along teams of two CGJ jurors each were formed. These jurors witnessed how situations are approached. They also observed the effectiveness of the various initiatives and policy changes prescribed by the County Board of Supervisors and city police departments.

The CGJ wants to commend the men and women of law enforcement and extend our gratitude for their dedication and service in helping keep our cities and neighborhoods safe. They are first responders who, at times, need to comfort and care for people who have been in an accident or suffered a traumatic event. We discovered that this is a very demanding job physically, mentally and emotionally performed by men and women who put their lives on the line in responding to events within the community.

II BACKGROUND

Strategy I.3 of the County Board of Supervisor's Strategic Plan (2016-2021) calls for reformation of the justice system as follows;

- Reduce involvement with the justice system among vulnerable populations
- Increase appropriate health, mental health and substance use disorder services
- Expand the number of Mental Health Evaluation Teams (METs) and training for policing agencies
- Support statewide efforts to decriminalize homelessness

One ride-along team was informed by their ride-along officer that there is a segment of the homeless population that suffers from severe mental illness, and there is another segment that suffers from drug induced psychoses. This information was consistent with the statistics shared by several guest speakers that met with the CGJ. Our guest speakers informed the CGJ that these statistics were consistent for both the homeless population as well as with jail inmates. The CGJ wanted to gain first-hand knowledge of the extent of the underlying problem, its effect on local communities and how first-line responders were addressing the situation.

III METHODOLOGY

The CGJ decided that the best way to gain direct knowledge of changes within police departments was to participate in a police ride-along. This way, members of the CGJ could experience a day in the life of an officer. A ride-along would provide jurors direct access to officers in the field and allow them to witness incidents and to ask direct questions. Two person teams were formed, cities were selected, and ride-alongs were conducted. Ride-alongs were conducted in several different cities and with both police departments and sheriff's deputies to get a cross-section of the County. The police agencies were responsive and gracious in making us a part of their daily patrols. Our ride-alongs were conducted as part of normal shift operations within each of the selected departments.

IV RIDE-ALONG OBSERVATIONS

A. Burbank Police Department (BPD)

Two jurors rode along with the first shift at 6:00 am, and witnessed three incidents during the ride-along:

1. A female pedestrian was struck by a car while crossing the street. She appeared to have an injury and was taken to the hospital. The officers spent considerable time recording the incident, taking measurements, and assessing evidence to determine whether or not the pedestrian was within the crosswalk. The police report may also be used by the involved parties in the event there is a civil law suit arising from this incident.
2. Two motorists were engaged in a minor scuffle stemming from an earlier traffic accident where one of the involved parties fled the scene. The second motorist was attempting to be a good citizen and followed the motorist that fled the scene. The fleeing driver and the good citizen ended up causing a second traffic accident. Again, officers on the scene were taking statements and assessing evidence in an attempt to determine who was at fault for causing the second accident.
3. An individual was openly selling stolen merchandise on a city sidewalk next to a bus stop on a heavily traveled street. This individual was also found to be in possession of stolen mail as well as heroin and crack cocaine. He was arrested for possession, cuffed, and brought back to the station. The individual was very cooperative with the officers.

In addition to the ride-along, we spoke with several officers and were given a tour of the BPD headquarters. We learned the following:

1. Officers are constantly receiving information and must multi-task. They have two radio systems including a walkie-talkie and a separate earbud, and officers in squad cars have a separate video display in addition to the two radio systems.
2. There are homeless people in the city.
 - a. One officer categorized the homeless population by those who are severely mentally ill (our interpretation would be those that should be institutionalized), those with drug induced psychoses and are no longer capable of functioning normally, and people that are in a difficult situation and find themselves on the street.
 - b. When asked about the involvement of social services, one officer informed us that not all homeless people who receive housing vouchers will use them. Given that some vouchers are only for very temporary housing, some homeless people choose to stay in their encampment rather than pack up their belongings, move to a temporary facility, then find a new location and setup their lodging again. The disruption and potential loss of a comfortable setting dissuades them from using vouchers.
3. When asked if there were homeless people who were regular detainees of the jail, one officer informed us that they have a few people that will commit minor infractions in order to get into the jail. For these homeless people, the jail offers an opportunity to get cleaned up, fed, and be off the street for a short period.
4. When asked, one officer informed us there are a couple of organized gangs known to operate within the city.
5. We were shown a map with the various precincts within the city. When asked if officers rotate through the precincts, one officer informed us that most officers prefer to have an assigned precinct. This way they learn the neighborhood and its residents, and they can tell more easily if something isn't right. In addition to residents and businesses, officers have the opportunity to check on the welfare of the local homeless people.
6. BPD has a full-time Mental Health Evaluation team. The health clinician will accompany officers on certain calls to help diffuse situations.
7. When asked about recruitment, one officer informed us that recruiting is difficult. There is a stigma regarding police officers. The majority of recruits are college graduates. One officer said "When it goes right, no one hears about it. When it goes bad, everyone hears about it."
8. We were informed that only a small percentage of the force is ex-military.
9. An officer described the Ferguson Effect, stemming from the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. In their opinion, there appears to be some hesitation on engaging in proactive policing by officers across the nation in order to avoid damaging their careers or their department's reputation.
10. The County Probation Department has a dedicated office within BPD for an assigned juvenile officer.

11. Burbank PD has several community outreach programs. One such program is the Community Academy which provides civilians with a nine-week training program, finishing with the final session at the Police Academy.

We were very impressed by the professionalism of the Burbank PD and their dedication to the community.

B. Culver City Police Department (CCPD)

Two jurors were given a brief tour of the station and spoke with officers and the watch commander before heading out on a ride-along. We rode in an unmarked car with a supervisor who monitors the police radio as he drives. The supervisor supports the field officers and does not respond to calls unless they are especially urgent or backup is needed. Our supervisor has intimate knowledge of the city. While many calls came in over the radio as we rode, none were of the sort to which the supervisor would normally respond. For our benefit, he did respond to one incident in order for us to gain experience with an officer-involved action.

Four young men had been pulled over for a minor infraction; their car apparently had a broken headlight. The young men were recognized as local gang members, so the officer asked and was allowed to search the car. The supervisor had us wait at a safe distance while he went to investigate, as he did not feel the situation would be a safe one for us to approach. The young men sat and “mouthed off” at the officers as their car was searched. Though we couldn’t hear what they said to the officers, the officers did not appear to be distracted and went about their work in a professional manner. In the end, nothing illegal was found in the car and the young men were allowed to go. By the time they left, the demeanor of the young men had changed; they appeared much less tense.

During our station visit and ride-along we learned the following:

1. Culver City is a long, narrow, oddly-shaped community, which poses some problems for patrolling and policing. The city is divided into four precincts. There has been discussion about splitting the city into five precincts, but they do not currently have the manpower. Despite this challenging geographic situation, the Department boasts a four-minute response time, and they aim for three minutes. The CCPD regards itself as “one of the most proactive agencies you’ll see.”
2. They have a good relationship with the Los Angeles Police Department, and they offer each other mutual aid. They have a similar arrangement with the Santa Monica Police Department, the University of California, Los Angeles Police Department, and the West Hollywood Sheriff’s Station. Any of these agencies can request that a squad be on standby for large demonstrations and other anticipated events.

3. The first shift of the day starts at 7 am, with half an hour to discuss training.
4. The station has about 13 holding cells, and usually two or three persons are detained there. Those who are not transported to other locations but released back into the community are always released in the daytime.
5. The Department has a full-time mental-health professional. The Department calls upon him frequently and relies heavily on him.
6. The Department participates in several community outreach programs, including the annual Coffee with a Cop event and Citizen's Police Academy, an eight-week program in which 12-15 people meet once a week to learn about such issues as police use of force.
7. Our officer told us that the Culver City Police Department enjoys a remarkable level of support from the community.

C. Los Angeles County Sheriff Department, Lancaster Station

Two jurors arrived at 7:45 am and attended roll call at 8:10 am. There were 11 uniformed deputies present. The daily assignments were made, along with a recap of the previous shift's unusual occurrences and incidents regarding problematic known violators.

The morning briefing included the following topics:

1. They discussed laws pertaining to the killing of animals. There had been several recent incidents of animals (dogs, cows, and deer) being killed without a court order or the Post Commander's permission. A pit bull attack put an officer in immediate danger, which warranted the killing of that animal. Emphasis was placed on the proper treatment of animals.
2. There was a discussion regarding an officer who was recently fired for the lying about something he had done. The department can and will address mistakes, but will not accept lying. "Tell it like it is."
3. Transitional Housing was discussed. We learned a person living in congregate housing is called a "program participant" not a "tenant." Instead of being labeled a "landlord," the owner or manager is a "program operator." Violations of conditions of program arrangements can be a criminal offense. Eviction of a program participant only needs a signed move out order from a judge. If the participant does not comply with the order, it becomes a criminal matter, as opposed to a tenant eviction, which is a civil matter.
4. Vehicle safety and costs were discussed. One fully equipped vehicle costs \$88,000. The need to drive safely was emphasized.

We joined a senior officer with over 20 years of experience, and responded to six dispatched calls during our ride along.

1. There was a suspected burglary at a local restaurant, which was later identified as malicious mischief and vandalism, as nothing was stolen. A corner window of the restaurant was smashed and broken. Our officer explained that if the cost to repair the damage exceeds \$1,000, the charges change from a misdemeanor to felony vandalism. The alleged suspect(s) are unknown, but a truck has been identified as the vehicle used during the incident.

2. The Fire Department was called to a retailer because of an inebriated male in a parking lot. Because he was drunk, the man was taken to the hospital for evaluation before being taken into custody.
3. We responded to an abandon vehicle call. However, there was no car at the location when we arrived. The car most likely had run out of gas.
4. We responded to a hit and run at a local fast food restaurant. A non-English speaking woman and her daughter were on the scene when we arrived. Their car was struck by someone backing out of a parking space. The driver of the other car fled the scene. Our deputy spoke Spanish to the victims and was able to generate a police report. The motorist was given the report and number for insurance purposes. The offending driver had used an Electronic Fund Transfer Card to make the purchase at the restaurant. The card user can be identified thru another government agency. Our officer stated he would refer this incident to the detective bureau for investigation. The detectives will trace the card user then determine if charges will be filed.
5. We were called to a “Face Book Fracas”. Four high school students were involved in an altercation over a posting on Facebook. One student, the victim, had visible facial bruising. These bruises prompted the alleged victim’s mother to call the school and report the incident. It was learned that the victim was the one who instigated the incident. All students involved will get a five-day suspension.
6. A County Sheriff’s patrol car was rear ended by a tow truck hitch. There was minor damage to the patrol car and a report was generated.

Prior to the ride along, we addressed the following issues:

1. Homeless Population: A deputy explained the high presence of homeless near and around the police station. This is because of its proximity to several community-based program operators and homeless shelters. The deputy told us how the nearby vacant lot is set up with tents to house 300 people during rain, sleet and snow.
2. High speed chases are a non-issue. There are many dead end streets and dirt roads, which makes it almost impossible for someone to escape in a high speed chase. If there is a high speed chase, helicopter support would be rare because of frequent high winds in the area.
3. Unattended deaths are called into the County coroner. The 1-2 hour drive time response time is not an issue. During this time, officers have time to conduct and conclude their investigation.
4. Police gear. We were informed that all the gear the deputies wear weighs between 25-30 pounds.

D. Los Angeles City Police Department, Rampart Division

Two jurors arrived at the Rampart Police Station at 6:45 am on March 6, 2017 for the 7:00 am roll call. The roll call was attended by the watch-commander, a supervisor and eleven patrol officers.

The watch commander began the roll call by first discussing that weekend's officer involved fatality of a civilian. He summarized that this was an unfortunate example of the sometimes justifiable use of force that the general public unfortunately does not understand.

Each patrol car is staffed with two officers. Since there were eleven officers attending this early morning roll call one of our jurors asked if one of the cars would be patrolling with only one officer in what is purported to be the most notorious areas in Los Angeles. We were advised that in case of an incident, the officer would contact a supervisor who would be dispatched to assist.

We learned about a tactic used by gang members wanting a particular officer removed from the district is to constantly make unwarranted complaints. A claim would be made that the officer stopped them because of their race or ethnicity. They would then demand a supervisor, who would be immediately dispatched. This is not only time-consuming but a wasteful use of resources.

After a tour of the facility we went on a ride along through the densely populated 5.4 square mile Rampart district patrol area. The Rampart Police Division includes Chinatown, Downtown, East Hollywood, Echo Park, Koreatown, Pico-Union, Silver Lake, and Westlake.

Our ride along with a supervisor included driving through Alvarado Street between 6th and 7th and around McArthur Park. The Park has become a homeless encampment burdened with massive debris piles, homeless and other indigent people, drug dealers and gangs. Across the street from the park the sidewalks are clogged with make-shift tables of street vendors selling all types of products and food items.

We encountered no incidents during our ride-along. We did observe the massive amount of sensory information bombarding officers during their patrols. This included listening to reports through an ear piece while also receiving and sending information via computers during the patrol.

After returning to the Rampart Station, we were invited to participate in a demonstration of Force Option Simulator (FOS) training practice. This training gives interactive practice and instruction on handling encounters with aggressive perpetrators in a number of changing scenarios by quickly choosing between available tools such as pepper spray, police Taser or a sidearm. At the conclusion of the practice we were given feedback on our performance and both jurors passed with flying colors.

The men and women of the Rampart Police Division have a very difficult assignment with the ever changing population they are committed to protect and to serve. The CGJ is profoundly concerned about the Rampart Division Patrol officers and their staff being crippled due to budget cuts and staffing shortages. The massive amount of paperwork needed after an incident when an

officer has been on duty for twelve hours is prohibitive and negatively impacts the effectiveness of the entire department.

All residents of Los Angeles deserve to have a safe and healthy environment for themselves and their families without being victimized by the criminal element.

V FINDINGS

1. Homelessness is an issue affecting virtually every community within the County. Unfortunately, there is a stigma associated with homelessness. In reality every homeless person has a unique story and set of circumstances associated with their situation. Police departments are aware of this situation and some have dedicated teams devoted to assisting the homeless population.
2. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is a joint powers authority of the City and the County of Los Angeles created to address the problems of homelessness in the County. On February 2, 2016, the County Board of Supervisors approved LAHSA's County Homeless Initiative's set of 47 comprehensive strategies to combat homelessness. These include First Responders Training (Strategy E.4) for law enforcement, fire departments, and paramedics throughout the County.
3. Some local police departments have specialized units that connect the homeless to local agencies offering supportive services. Examples include: Long Beach Police Department's Quality of Life Unit; Pasadena Police Department's Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Evaluation team; and Santa Monica Police Department's Homeless Liaison Program.
4. Police officers are showing compassion for homeless people. They are coordinating with local social service providers and accommodating homeless people who create nuisance crimes in order to get cleaned up and receive a meal. As an example, during a detention visit to one police station, jurors were told of a particular homeless person who would periodically urinate in the lobby in order to get checked into the station. There were officers at other police stations that also stated they had certain homeless people that would check in on a regular basis.
5. Some city police departments may be unnecessarily weeding out ex-military personnel during the recruitment process. This is because some cities want to avoid the risk of these individuals being accused of having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and incur undue legal damages. On the other hand, the CGJ was informed by leadership within the Sheriff's Department their staff is comprised of approximately 25% ex-military personnel. It appears the mental health screening portion of the hiring process may be arbitrarily disqualifying otherwise qualified applicants.

VI RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority should review the specialized care units within the Long Beach, Pasadena, and Santa Monica Police Department to identify best practices to incorporate into first responders training materials as an overall part of the County's Continuum of Care.
2. The Los Angeles Police Department should increase manpower in the Rampart Division.

VII REQUIRED RESPONSES

California Penal Code Sections 933(c) and 933.05 require a written response to all recommendations contained in this report. Such responses shall be made no later than ninety (90) days after the Civil Grand Jury publishes its report (files it with the Clerk of the Court). Responses shall be made in accord with Penal Code Sections 933.05 (a) and (b).

All responses to the recommendations of the 2016-2017 Civil Grand Jury must be submitted on or before September 30, 2017, to:

Presiding Judge
Los Angeles County Superior Court
Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center
210 West Temple Street
Eleventh Floor-Room 11-506
Los Angeles, California 90012

Responses are required from:

Responding Agency	Recommendations
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority	13.1
City of Los Angeles Police Department	13.2

VIII ACRONYMS

BPD	Burbank Police Department
CCPD	Culver City Police Department
CGJ	2016-2017 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury
LAHSA	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
MET	Mental Health Evaluation Teams
PD	Police Department

IX RIDE ALONG TEAMS

1. Burbank Police Department
Marilyn Gelfand
Thomas Kearney
2. Culver City Police Department
Gerard Duiker
Shelley Strohm
3. Lancaster Sheriff's Station
Alice Beener Facilitator
Ronnie Dann-Honor
4. Los Angeles Police Department, Rampart Community Police Station
Dorothy Brown
Patrick Lyons

THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT AND OUR KIDS?



Gloria Garfinkel Chair
Hilda Dallal
Ronnie Dann-Honor