

BOLO

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The Newsletter for the Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association



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Leadership Failures Call LAXPD Chief Gannon Appointment Into Question

By Marshall McClain, President

When Patrick Gannon became Chief of the Los Angeles Airport Police Department in November 2012, he said he had applied for the position because “I thought this would be an interesting challenge.” LAAPOA was initially hopeful that Chief Gannon would follow through on his stated commitment to keep the force strong and self-sufficient, but two years into the job, it is clear that he has failed to rise to the “interesting challenge” at hand. With morale down, personnel complaints up, funds mismanaged, urgently needed security improvements left undone, and staffing woefully inadequate, LAXPD desperately needs a leader who understands the unique nature of airport law enforcement and is dedicated to fostering the Department’s autonomy — not one who maintains unnecessary dependence on the LAPD and denies that there are problems that need to be addressed.



A few months before Chief Gannon’s appointment, a UCLA Department of Public Policy study commissioned by the Homeland Security Advisory Council determined that the optimal law enforcement structure for LAX would be to grant LAXPD greater control and authority over all aspects of daily policing at the airport, reducing the LAPD’s overlapping and redundant role. When it came time to hire a police chief, however, instead of conducting a nationwide search for a candidate experienced in aviation law enforcement or other specialized policing, airport officials chose a 34-year veteran of the LAPD. Not surprisingly, this has hamstrung the progress toward LAXPD independence.

The continuing rise in passenger traffic at LAX and lavish airport expansion call for increased police staffing to address the growing security demands. But soon after his arrival, Gannon began allowing staffing to decrease, thereby making airport

police more dependent on LAPD resources to fill in personnel gaps. Despite LAX crime rates jumping 10% in his first year on the job, outpacing growth in passenger volume, Gannon was still promoted to Deputy Executive Director of Law Enforcement and Security Services in addition to Police Chief, rather than conducting a nationwide search to fill the vacant

position. Even after the November 1, 2013, shooting exposed the dangers of the split-policing model and the critical need for more training, heightened deployment and other security measures, the number of LAXPD sworn officers kept steadily declining, reaching its lowest level since 2008. Yet the Chief continues to publicly maintain that the force size is sufficient, even in the face of ample evidence that it is not.

The November 1 shooting highlighted Gannon’s failure to prepare the Department for major incidents on a supervisory level. The front-line officers did an outstanding job that day, but post-incident reviews faulted management’s support and coordination. Back in 2011, the commissioned report of the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Airport Security gave a mandate to improve LAXPD management’s ability to appropriately handle and supervise front-line officers, but Gannon didn’t shoulder this task when he took command. Instead, there have been more personnel complaints, grievances, unfair labor practices and even lawsuits during his two-year tenure than in any time previously.

The Chief should be working to improve procedures and prepare supervisors to handle situations as they arise, yet since his arrival he has deferred more command and control

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responsibilities to LAPD, keeping LAXPD reliant on an outside entity to respond to situations at the airport and essentially facilitating LAWA's illegal diversion of federal aviation funds to City coffers. In April, a U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General audit found diversion of airport policing funds and other citations at LAX in the amount of \$49 million, as well as numerous irregularities relating to an additional \$7.9 million in undocumented policing monies, with the most egregious diversionary tactics focused on contracted LAPD officers assigned to LAX being paid by LAWA for off-airport work. By maintaining LAXPD dependence on LAPD, Gannon enables the continued siphoning of funds that should be spent on airport operations and public safety, but instead are lining the City's pockets.

Chief Gannon's consistent failure to adequately represent airport police has stunted the Department's growth and development. Both experts and voters have already spoken in support of leaving airport policing to a dedicated agency, and LAXPD's autonomy is enshrined in the City Charter. No other major city in the nation with its own airport police force has the municipal police patrolling airports, nor does anyone see a need for the LAPD at the Port of Los Angeles — so why at LAX? This involvement is even more superfluous now that AB 128 has conferred 830.1 classification on L.A. Airport Police officers, granting them the same status and authorities as the LAPD. With AB 109 and Proposition 47 threatening public safety throughout the state, and with crime rates increasing, it is even more important now than ever that all City resources be returned to protecting and serving the citizens of Los Angeles. It just makes sense that LAXPD should be a fully self-sufficient police force, with LAPD called upon only in emergency situations to augment the force, not as a daily deployment.

To make this happen, however, LAXPD needs leadership without conflicting ties to the City. A search should be conducted for a qualified replacement who will bring fresh ideas about the best law enforcement practices that will work for the airport police, rather than what works for LAPD. The net should be cast nationwide, to rule out any local bias or prejudice, and it should focus on candidates with a specialized policing background. Airport policing is different in many ways from municipal law enforcement, and LAWA is a dynamic regional environment where a chief of police needs to be well-versed in working with multiple agencies at the federal, state and local levels — perhaps a sheriff who has experience working with many entities throughout the county would be better suited to the task. Only a leader who is truly committed to tackling the challenge of building LAXPD into a strong and independent agency can help the Department surmount its many problems and have a real impact on bolstering public safety at Los Angeles airports.



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The Board of Directors meets quarterly on the third Thursday of January, April, July and October at the LAPOA Headquarters. Additional meetings and/or times are subject to change and will be posted as they occur.

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Proposition 47 Creates Public Safety Concerns

Proposition 47 is dubbed the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act, but LAAPOA and other law enforcement groups believe its effects will be anything but safe. In a misguided effort to reduce the prison population, save money, and direct more funding to treatment and rehabilitation programs, the initiative goes too far, making sweeping changes to a justice system still grappling with the effects of realignment and other recent events. With the Yes on 47 campaign outpacing the opposition 17-to-1, Prop 47 was approved by 59% of California voters on November 4 and went into effect the next day — leaving police and prosecutors scrambling to understand and implement the revisions to state law, and raising urgent questions about the impact on public safety.

In this new landscape, six categories of nonviolent crimes that were previously arrestable as felonies are now only citable as misdemeanors, unless committed by criminals with prior convictions for severe crimes such as homicide: drug possession, grand theft, shoplifting, check forgery, receiving stolen property and writing bad checks (for all of these, the stolen items or checks must total less than \$950). Members of law enforcement argue that this sends the wrong message, not only to criminals who now face fewer consequences for their deeds, but also to crime victims, businesses damaged by theft and fraud, and the community as a whole. The money saved is supposed to be earmarked for mental health and drug rehabilitation programs, but won't be calculated until 2016 and will take even longer to be distributed.

Public safety members predict that the result of all of this will be a crime wave. In the shorter term, the justice system is struggling to adjust to the immediate ramifications. City attorneys are preparing for a large influx of new misdemeanor prosecutions that previously would have been felonies handled by district attorneys, and local courts may soon be swamped by petitions for resentencing. The L.A. District Attorney's Office advises that — thanks to the new \$950 threshold for felony thefts — police officers now need to remember to obtain evidence of value from victims or other sources and include that information in crime and arrest reports. Additional unforeseen repercussions will likely make themselves known in the weeks and months ahead.

"LAAPOA is disappointed that so many voters were misled into passing this flawed measure that does nothing to make California's neighborhoods and schools safer, and instead endangers them," says President Marshall McClain. "To the many other challenges LAXPD officers currently face, the risks generated by Proposition 47 add another layer of obstacles to safeguarding our airports and communities. We remain committed to our mission, but even more so than before, we need all the resources available to help us protect the traveling public and the people of Los Angeles."



As Holidays Approach, Airport Police Staffing Remains Inadequate

With the anniversary of the tragic shooting of TSA Officer Gerardo Hernandez just past and the busy holiday travel season about to start, protecting passengers en route to reunite with their loved ones is at the forefront of airport police officers' thoughts. Unfortunately, although there have been some improvements in procedures and interagency cooperation since 2013, not enough has changed at the West Coast's top terrorist target.

Making Change Happen: Airport Commission Must Request OIG Review

As LAXPD is plagued by issues of understaffing, desperately needed equipment and systems upgrades, misspent funds, low morale, personnel complaints, and lack of progress on vital security improvements, LAAPOA continues to call for an investigation by the City Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to get to the root of the dysfunction — but the Board of Airport Commissioners (BOAC) must take the lead in initiating an audit. If BOAC fails to act, mismanagement and misconduct threaten to undermine public safety at LAX.





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