



George Gascón, Esq.
Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office
211 West Temple Street Suite 1200 Los Angeles,
CA 90012

December 7, 2020

Dear Members of the Los Angeles County Law Enforcement Community:

Some of you may know my story. I walked my first beat for the Los Angeles Police Department over 40 years ago and worked my way up the ranks to become an Assistant Chief. I went on to serve as the Chief of Police in both conservative and progressive American cities, and served two terms as the elected San Francisco District Attorney. Today I will have the distinct honor and privilege of being sworn in as Los Angeles County's District Attorney and Chief Law Enforcement Officer. It will be a proud day for my family and me, much like the day I was sworn in as an LAPD officer over 40 years ago.

While my methods have changed over the years, my mission today is largely the same as it was when I began my law enforcement journey; to prevent crime, reduce recidivism, and restore victims. Law enforcement is integral to LA's safety and livability—and I'm confident we can advance as a community and as a profession if we stand together to both lift up our strengths and confront our weaknesses.

The criminal justice system is highly skilled at arresting and incarcerating those who pose a danger. But for decades now police have increasingly been tasked with dealing with *both* the dangerous and the nuisance. We don't ask bus drivers to fly planes, just like we don't ask high school teachers to teach medical students, but the public has unfairly asked you to handle every manner of social ill facing society. It has severely complicated our profession and crippled our effectiveness in the eyes of the public. The status quo is simply unsustainable for our profession and the communities we serve.

Efforts to get police out of the public health business and refocus law enforcement on what it does best have largely been dubbed "defunding the police" and antithetical to public safety by law

enforcement unions. More public health officers and fewer police officers is decidedly not in your union's best interest since it reduces dues paying members, bargaining power and influence, but I encourage you to examine whether refocusing policing exclusively on protecting the community from those that are dangerous is ultimately in *your* interests—let alone in the best interests of the public.

I am not the same man I was when I walked my first beat in Hollywood in 1978, but despite some depictions to the contrary I support every officer that serves honorably. This is because I have direct, first-hand experience with the challenges you face on a daily basis, and because I have tremendous appreciation for the sacrifices members of law enforcement and their families make to uphold safety. My support for good police and policing, however, is as steadfast as my profound intolerance for those that stain our profession.

During my career I have become a fierce advocate for good policing for largely the same reasons I seek to hold bad police accountable. It's not simply because I believe Black Lives Matter, or because of the oath I will take today to uphold the constitution and ensure *equal* justice under the law. It's also the fundamental reality that those who engage in unconstitutional policing have severely hindered the standing and safety of us all. We are all scarred by their misdeeds, leading many in our communities to perceive police as persecutors instead of protectors.

Compounding that dynamic is the reality that too often our profession has failed to hold its own to the same standards that we impose on the communities we are sworn to protect and serve. That has created a chasm that the public largely views as a two-tiered system of justice; one for “us” and one for “them.” In order to do this work effectively—and safely—we cannot afford to be in an adversarial posture with those we serve. It has led to the unrest over the summer and it has severely degraded our standing in the communities where we both work and live.

To repair this harm we must meet the demands of the public, and we must hold ourselves to the same standards as we do the communities we police. To that end, during the campaign I reviewed several troubling use of force cases my predecessor declined to prosecute where the basis for the declination was contradicted by the publicly available physical evidence. In order to restore faith in the process, and in our profession, I have pledged to reopen four of the dozens of fatal officer-involved-shooting cases we reviewed. In an effort to be thorough and restore trust, I am convening a group of policing experts, civil rights attorneys and community members that will be supported by the University of California at Irvine's Civil Rights and Criminal Justice Clinics in their reviews of fatal uses of force cases dating back to 2012.

The law enforcement community can expect a lot from me. You can expect that I will listen and consider all evidence, and that there will be neither sacred cows nor sacrificial lambs. You can expect that I will work to reduce incarceration and punishment except in those circumstances in which punishment is proportional, is in the community's best interest, and serves a rehabilitative or restorative purpose.

Front and center to all my efforts are victims of crimes and their needs. For too long, law enforcement has justified tough-on-crime policies in the name of victims instead of actually listening to what they want and need on their journey from victim to survivor. We must work together to support victims' needs, to ensure their continued safety, and build a system that prioritizes healing them rather than a singular focus on punishing perpetrators. That approach severely backfired, it exacerbated recidivism rates, and it left a wake of victims in its path.

To end this cycle there are significant changes coming to my office, and the outcomes you may be accustomed to when you present some types of arrests will change. We will, for example, divert rather than prosecute many low-level first-time offenses due to the collateral consequences and destabilizing nature of a criminal conviction. Where a response is needed our public health system can more sustainably and more effectively enhance safety and opportunity. But my deputies will never know if it's a first-time offense, and the extent of an individual's harm to our community, if police make decisions based on perceived downstream consequences. I will take full responsibility for the outcomes delivered by my office, but I cannot do that if I do not have cases to deliver outcomes on.

I hope to hear from and work with the law enforcement community to advance these practices, enhance public safety, and minimize harm. We need to reimagine the way we've done business for the last half-century, and I need you at the table.

With great respect and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Gascón", written in a cursive style.

George Gascón
Los Angeles County District Attorney-Elect