



# OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

HALL OF JUSTICE

ALEX VILLANUEVA, SHERIFF



May 13, 2020

The Honorable Kathryn Barger  
Chair, Board of Supervisors  
County of Los Angeles  
869 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Supervisor Barger:

## CHILD WELFARE CHECKS

I am writing this correspondence to express my disappointment with your apparent involvement in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) decision to withdraw from an agreement with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) to conduct child welfare checks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When I became aware of a substantial drop in Suspected Child Abuse Reports (SCARs) as a result of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Department's Safer at Home Order during the COVID-19 pandemic, I became very concerned that the limited contact with mandated child abuse reporters may be resulting in unreported child abuse. I contacted Bobby Cagle, Director of DCFS, and on two separate occasions, he expressed his desire to work with LASD to conduct supplementary checks on the most vulnerable youth.

I directed Captain Michael Hannemann of the Special Victim's Bureau (SVB), to collaborate with DCFS and the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and develop protocols for patrol checks of vulnerable children until school and other normal youth activities resumed. Captain Hannemann coordinated with the top leadership of both DCFS and LACOE to establish best practices that were consistent with our already established protocols for handling SCARs and investigating child abuse allegations. Through numerous meetings, a protocol was established where DCSF would provide basic information to SVB, and this information would be provided to patrol personnel to conduct a non-intrusive, at home welfare check of children (e.g. knocking on the door

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and talking to the children and their parents). As with other emergency orders during the pandemic, the details were captured in a Department Operations Center [REDACTED]. All stakeholders in DCFS and LASD were given the opportunity to provide input to the procedures, which were reviewed by County Counsel before being finalized.

As the Chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board), your office became aware of our intention to provide child welfare checks and asked for a presentation to the justice and children deputies. Captain Hannemann participated in a teleconference with the Justice and Children Deputies wherein he described the background, research, coordination, and procedures for the child welfare checks in detail. Despite answering all questions posed, it was apparent there was an underlying displeasure with LASD doing child welfare checks and an implied doubt that Captain Hannemann and I had coordinated with both DCFS and County Counsel.

Several days after this meeting, I spoke with Director Cagle who mentioned DCFS would not be participating with LASD in the child welfare checks. I was shocked that the leader of DCFS would change his mind on such an important matter. After learning the discontent of the justice deputies, through channels, it seemed this effort was sabotaged. Unfortunately, this decision does nothing to help children victims of abuse.

I am hopeful there will be reconsideration for this collaboration between our two departments. At this time, we are still doing what we can in patrol to work with school districts to conduct child welfare checks. All of our Department established protocols for SCARs and child abuse investigations are still in effect. My efforts to work with DCFS and extend the assistance of our patrol resources are to ensure that we never repeat the circumstances involved in the tragic death of Gabriel Fernandez. Contrary to Supervisor Kuehl's public statement regarding child welfare checks, the only people who do not want deputies to be "banging on people's doors" are the ones harming their children.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Assistant Sheriff Steven E. Gross, [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. Villanueva", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

ALEX VILLANUEVA  
SHERIFF