



# OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

HALL OF JUSTICE

ALEX VILLANUEVA, SHERIFF



April 6, 2020

The Honorable Kathryn Barger  
Chair, County of Los Angeles  
869 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Supervisor Barger:

## SHARED MISSION OF FIGHTING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

I have read your letter dated April 3, 2020, and I share your concerns expressed in your communique. No one, including public officials, should be subject to threats for the lawful actions they take. As a frequent recipient of such threats, I can empathize and encourage the reporting of such threats through the appropriate law enforcement agency for proper investigation and threat assessment. This conduct is not tolerable under any circumstances.

I am puzzled though by your assertion, "Your actions undermine our essential shared mission of fighting the COVID-19 emergency together, as one County family, united in unwavering support to the public we are pledged to serve." On March 12, 2020, as the Director of Emergency Operations, I elevated the County Emergency Operations Center (CEOC) to a Level 1 Alert, which resulted in the mobilization of all Los Angeles County Departments in response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Within days, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's representative at the Joint Information Center observed a deliberate slowdown in the release of information based on decisions made at the CEOC.

This slowdown was traced to your offices in the 5<sup>th</sup> Supervisorial District, as a shadow command structure, designed to circumvent the Incident Command System established by California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). On March 19, 2020, you directed your personnel to arrange a hasty press conference late in the afternoon, in a bid to get on the air before Governor Gavin Newsome, to announce the first health order.

211 WEST TEMPLE STREET, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012

*A Tradition of Service*  
— Since 1850 —

You also instructed your subordinates to exclude both Los Angeles County Fire Department Chief Daryl Osby and myself in this very important announcement, which was poorly vetted and failed to inform the public properly on the importance of the message. Most troubling is the fact the entire operation occurred outside of the recognized emergency management system already in operation at the CEOC.

On or about March 20, 2020, during the regularly scheduled conference call with all members of the Unified Coordination Group, I questioned Dr. Barbara Ferrer as to why she participated in the press conference the day before without authorization of the CEOC. She informed me she worked for Supervisor Barger, not the CEOC, and she "did not have time for that."

It is difficult to reconcile your position with the actions you have taken to undermine the Incident Command System behind closed doors, making unilateral decisions without regard of the impact to the community and hiring two public relations firms without the knowledge of the CEOC. This is in spite of the fact there were a total of 47 Public Information Officers and multi-lingual capacity at our disposal.

One of the firms you hired, Fraser Communications, was fined by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for insider trading. It appears their services have been enlisted by the Board of Supervisors not for the purpose of the COVID-19, but for a campaign against my office and my (now former) role as Director of Emergency Operations.

The disagreements between myself and the Board of Supervisors cannot overshadow the issues at hand. While we have political differences with regard to how certain situations are handled, we cannot continue to let those differences interfere with our common goal of protecting the community. This is true not only during this time of crisis, but as we continue to be in the position of public servants.

As you so accurately stated, we are a family, and all families have differences. My desire going forward is for us to continue to challenge each other on those points of difference as we are not going to always agree, but to do so in a transparent and respectful manner. That is my commitment to the residents of Los Angeles County.

I respectfully propose a meeting be scheduled between us to work out our differences and move forward. I believe through communication and open dialogue, we can put past differences behind us and form a more effectual partnership which can better serve our communities now and in the future.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 229-3000.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alex Villanueva', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ALEX VILLANUEVA  
SHERIFF

AV:AV:ac  
(Office of the Sheriff)

cc: Xavier Becerra, Attorney General, State of California  
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, First District, Board of Supervisors  
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Second District, Board of Supervisors  
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, Third District, Board of Supervisors  
Supervisor Janice Hahn, Fourth District, Board of Supervisors  
Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer  
Mary Wickham, County Counsel, Office of the County Counsel