



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 4, 2017

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[Improving Civil Service Accountability](#)

The Board of Supervisors voted to review the civil service hearing process to ensure Los Angeles County employees are held to the highest standards of trustworthiness, especially if they are responsible for public safety or serve vulnerable populations.

Acting on a [motion](#) by Board Chairman Mark Ridley-Thomas and Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, the Board called for analyzing whether civil service rules should be amended to allow the discharge, reassignment, or other discipline of employees who have made false statements, misrepresentations and omissions of material facts in internal investigations. It will also assess whether to keep track of different classifications of employees who should be held to a higher standard of honesty in the workplace.

“We are committed as a Board to maintaining a diverse and skilled workforce dedicated to serving our residents with integrity, courtesy and excellence,” Board Chair Ridley-Thomas said during the Board meeting. “If there is a question of whether the disciplinary systems here in our County are effective enough, we have an obligation to address any gaps in a manner that is fair and transparent while, at the same time, honoring and respecting employee rights.”

“County residents should be able to put their faith in the trustworthiness and honesty of all County employees, most especially those who are responsible for public safety and where lives are at stake,” Supervisor Kuehl said. “The motion

will provide the Board of Supervisors with the tools we need to hold our employees accountable if they violate that trust and lie in internal investigations.”

Several people who attended the Board meeting to testify in support of the motion expressed concern over recent events involving County employees. Last month, former Sheriff Lee Baca was convicted of making false statements, obstruction of justice and conspiracy in connection with a federal investigation into excessive use of force at County jails. This coincided with the filing of assault charges against Probation officers in connection with the videotaped beating of a 17-year-old at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall in Sylmar. Days later, a judge ordered four social workers to stand trial in connection with the torture and murder of 8-year-old Gabriel Fernandez in Palmdale.

Daniel Heimpel, publisher of The Chronicle of Social Change, an online publication with a focus on child welfare and juvenile justice, noted existing civil service rules led to the reinstatement of one of the social workers fired in connection with the Gabriel Fernandez case. He told the Board, “What you’re doing today, in terms of trying to create a transparent and accountable system, not only helps (social) workers do their job better but it will also help protect the children.”

The County’s Inspector General for the Sheriff’s Department, Max Huntsman, blamed a “dysfunctional discipline system” for hampering the department’s ability to fire a certain deputy who has admitted to falsifying hundreds of police reports. “Civil service reform is a critical part of repairing that process,” he told the Board.

Merrick Bobb, the Board’s former Special Counsel monitoring the Sheriff’s Department, said the motion is “necessary for expanding accountability and for increasing transparency... (which are) critically important to maintain the integrity of the system.”

Alberto Retana, president of the nonprofit Community Coalition, said, “Failure to hold public servants accountable for misconduct threatens public trust and confidence in local government.”

A year ago, Board Chair Ridley-Thomas and Supervisor Kuehl filed a separate [motion](#) to evaluate the selection, qualifications, training and responsibilities of Civil Service Commission members, hearing officers and department advocates. In response to that motion, the County’s Chief Executive Office submitted a [report](#) listing several recommendations, including providing more training and offering an increase in compensation to attract a larger pool of candidates.