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Historic Vote Strengthens Oversight of Probation Department
Probation Oversight Commission and Inspector General
to Have Unprecedented Powers

Acting on a [motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Hilda Solis](#), and guided by a yearlong public process, the Board of Supervisors voted to overhaul and strengthen oversight of the long troubled Probation Department, including by creating a Probation Oversight Commission (POC) with unprecedented authority. The POC would have the power to compel the Probation Department, via subpoenas issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG), to provide information and testimony required for its investigations.

The POC will be endowed with all the authority currently vested in the existing Probation Commission, as well as new powers, including the ability to:

- advise the department and the Board on wide-ranging matters that affect the well-being of department staff as well as youth and adult probationers, guided by the [Probation Reform and Implementation Team \(PRIT\)'s Reform Plan](#);
- conduct investigations through the OIG;

- access department data, documents and direct testimony, and have the authority to compel its production through the OIG;
- conduct facility inspections; and
- establish an independent grievance process for the public and probation clients, and a process for advising on systemic staff issues.

“Reforming the Probation Department has never been more urgent, with both youth and staff in our juvenile facilities reporting feeling unsafe,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “Robust oversight of the largest and most complex department of its kind is long overdue and critical to the success of any reform, and this motion is intended to enhance transparency and accountability and, ultimately, restore the public’s trust in Probation.”

“The new Probation Oversight Commission will help guide the Probation Department toward positive culture change, reduced juvenile facilities, expanded and improved community services, and strengthened accountability and performance management,” Supervisor Solis said. “The Probation Oversight Commission will ensure that changes to the Probation Department are aligned with a truly transformational mission and vision, supported by modern best practices, and are created in partnership with community and labor stakeholders. This large leap forward will provide the public with ongoing opportunities to shape the future of probation in LA County.”

Earlier this year, the OIG demonstrated its ability to shed light on important issues involving the Probation Department, including investigating its use of pepper spray.

“As we’ve been reminded by events at the Sheriff’s Department in recent months, robust civilian oversight is critical for justice system fairness,” Inspector General Max Huntsman said. “Empowering the Probation Oversight Commission based on lessons learned in a way that maximizes access and input is essential to reform. The Office of Inspector General looks forward to providing the same investigative support to the Probation Oversight Commission that it has provided to the Civilian Oversight Commission for the Sheriff’s Department.”

Composed of experts in criminal justice, violence prevention and intervention, as well as social justice advocacy, the PRIT worked over a year to engage the community to help design the oversight structure for the Probation Department. They held 14 public hearings, many of which were attended by hundreds of stakeholders.

“The motion approved by the Board adopts many of the powers and authorities the PRIT recommended based on input from the community,” PRIT Executive Director Saul Sarabia said. “By erecting a robust Probation Oversight Commission, the Board has created a venue that all county stakeholders can work with to achieve accountability and transparency.”

Susan Burton, founder of the justice advocacy group, A New Way of Life, said, “For decades, probationers have been under the authority of a Probation Department with no oversight, and probationers have suffered from this lack of checks and balances. I’m excited to see the Board listen to the people and create a Probation Oversight Commission with the authority to compel the information it needs to ensure public safety as well as the health and wellbeing of the people of Los Angeles County.”

The Probation Department has a budget of almost \$1 billion and supervisory responsibility for more than 40,000 adult clients and about 8,000 youth, more than 900 of whom are detained as juvenile clients in the halls, camps and other facilities.

The Probation Oversight Commission would consist of nine members, including positions reserved for a person who has been an adult or youth probationer, a family member of someone who has been on probation, and a legal defense expert.

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