



# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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**MAX HUNTSMAN**  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

December 9, 2025

I am retiring as Inspector General this week.

It has been a privilege to spend my career serving the public, both as a prosecutor investigating and convicting public officials who violate the law, and as an inspector general reporting on public officials violating the law. Thank you for the honor.

When I was first hired in 2013, in the wake of the sheriff's department efforts to discredit an FBI investigation of their misconduct, I insisted on building the legal framework for establishing an inspector general's office to fulfill the county's duty under state law to supervise law enforcement. Previously, sheriff's department oversight had been characterized as attorneys for the sheriff, which kept much of the work secret. Under our new model, the Office of Inspector General has no attorney-client relationship with the sheriff's department and reports publicly.

Ironically, our most significant work began in 2019 when the sheriff's department put together a team to misuse its criminal enforcement powers to discredit critics. This included claims that Supervisor Sheila Kuehl and Chief Executive Officer Sachi Hamai illegally received money for government decisions, with no evidence at all that they'd received any money; claims that Diana Teran and I unlawfully viewed public records which the law specifically authorized us to view; and claims that reporters Maya Lau and Alene Tchekmedyan violated the law when they reported on matters the sheriff sought to keep secret. The team produced only failed criminal filings (all rejected by prosecutors except for one thrown out by the appellate court).

When voters removed the former sheriff who began this process, in part due to the Office of Inspector General's reporting, the sheriff's department had an opportunity to document its own misconduct and elected not to do so. My requests for investigation were rejected. Even after receiving an official subpoena, the sheriff's department has failed to turn over records regarding the improper surveillance. Sometimes members of the public wonder if frightening new surveillance techniques will be used for improper purposes under the guise of criminal investigation. Sadly, the answer is, yes.

In 2020, George Floyd's murder galvanized nationwide protests over law enforcement conduct, and California legislators took a closer look at police conduct than they had in the past. Seeing how local law enforcement often targets critics, the state passed a series of laws strengthening oversight. The state codified the inspector general's authority in supervising sheriffs; provided authority to enforce subpoenas; authorized external investigation of police misconduct, specifically including gang conduct; and established personal loss of status for peace officers

who do not cooperate. Los Angeles County may not follow those laws, but it will not be able to avoid them forever.

While the county has been unwilling or unable to address its own conduct when the Office of Inspector General has reported it, lawsuits have been filed, and court action may make a difference. Although the county refuses to require the photographing of suspected gang tattoos in secretive groups that the undersheriff has identified as violating state law, news reports note that a court settlement has been reached regarding the abuse of fellow deputies by one such group, the Banditos. The California Department of Justice conducted an extensive investigation into civil rights abuses in Los Angeles. After over a year of backroom negotiations, the state has filed an action to improve conditions in our overcrowded jails. A similar state action seeks to take over control of juvenile hall after years of abuses, including openly conducted gladiatorial fights.

Private citizens have also turned to the courts to vindicate their rights. One suit challenges the county's failure to provide shower privacy for prisoners in violation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act. In another, Maya Lau filed a lawsuit for the county's investigation of her. Despite a vigorous defense, an appellate court recently denied the county's motion to dismiss.

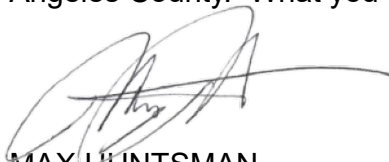
All of these abuses were reported by the Office of Inspector General and recommendations were ignored.

It is perhaps not surprising then, that the county has driven out two successive chairs of the Civilian Oversight Commission, permitted the sheriff's department to block oversight and has now defunded the Office of Inspector General by removing a third of its staff. Government always claims to value transparency and accountability, but shooting the messenger is still the most common response to criticism.

In my twelve years at this work, I have longed for the day that the county would address the conditions in our reports without a court fight. When we first blew the whistle on the torturous chaining of mentally ill prisoners to benches for thirty-six hours at a time, it was only a court order that ended the practice. Time and time again, this pattern repeated itself.

Some things never change.

But some things do change. It has been my honor to work with a talented, brave, and tireless group of public servants to ensure that the public knows what its government is doing. Our reports, all fact-checked, are now permanently public. When government abuses occur, they are sometimes kept secret, but that is no longer the case for much of what is happening in Los Angeles County. What you do about it is up to you.



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