



VIA EMAIL

Civilian Oversight Commission
Los Angeles County, California

October 3, 2020

RE: DEATH OF ERIC BRICENO

Los Angeles County Civilian Oversight Commission:

The Los Angeles Times story printed on September 22, 2020 regarding the tragic incident between Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies and Eric Briceno, son of Juan and Blanco Briceno, is much more than another unfortunate deadly interaction between law enforcement and someone with serious mental illness. The only information available publicly at this time is the story in the Times, but if the truth is close to the depiction of the facts as portrayed in the article, deputies abandoned good practices and de-escalation protocols in favor of physical intervention and the use of force.

NAMI Greater Los Angeles County (NAMI GLAC) will not ignore fatal use of force upon individuals living with serious mental illness by any law enforcement agency especially when the level of force appears unwarranted. According to the Times, Eric Briceno's parents had been told to call the Sheriff's Department back when their son returned home in order to obtain the mental health treatment he needed. He was sleeping when they arrived, deputies ignored the parents' plea to allow them to bring their son out of his room safely, and instead entered his bedroom. During the incident Mr. Briceno was pepper sprayed and shot with a Taser seven or eight times, according to the autopsy report.

NAMI GLAC is incredibly saddened that another person with serious mental illness has come to harm at the hands of law enforcement. As an integral partner to de-escalation training for the Sheriff's Department since its inception (in addition to all the other law enforcement agencies in our county), we are even more dismayed by this incident. We have presented to over 7,800 sworn officers and deputies since 2015. The behavior exhibited by the two deputies who arrived on the scene of the mental health crisis call from Eric Briceno's parents epitomizes everything NAMI GLAC and the LASD training effort has sought to avoid. The investigation and potentially the court will decide on accountability for the death of Eric Briceno. We are asking the Los Angeles Sheriff's Civilian Oversight Commission to perform a full review of the Eric Briceno incident to confirm the facts with full public transparency in order that remedies may be developed to prevent anything like this from ever happening again.

There is a second related matter that we feel compelled to bring to light. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department has begun scaling back its commitment to robust CIT training this year. In past years, the number of Patrol CIT classes has ranged between 16 and 25 annually. Only six



have been scheduled for Patrol deputies in 2020 and only four are planned for 2021. These are dramatic reductions in training!

We applaud the strong support the Sheriff's Department and the County of Los Angeles provide in expanding the number of MET (Mental Evaluation Team) teams. However, they are not available for every mental health call, just as they were not present at the Briceno home that day, and it is the deputy who arrives who must interact with an individual in crisis. It is very important that the deputy on the scene have all the skills necessary to successfully manage that situation without resorting to force. The Briceno incident is important evidence that a substantive and increased commitment to CIT training and de-escalation skillsets for all deputies is necessary to support further culture change and reform. Clearly, we need more training, not less, to prevent future failed interactions between Sheriff Deputies and individuals with serious mental illness in crisis.

Additionally, we fully support the motion by Supervisor Hahn passed by the Board of Supervisors this week to create a new non-law enforcement Alternative Crisis Response (ACR) model in our county. Los Angeles County needs it along with CIT-trained deputies, a fully funded MET division and Alternatives to Incarceration implementation. One does not replace the other. A well-designed, comprehensive approach will allow for the appropriate response to the appropriate situation.

The Department must answer why they believe reducing de-escalation training is in the best interests of the Department, their deputies, and the residents of Los Angeles County. This Commission provides the public with the means to register our disappointment and concern for the death of Eric Briceno and the reduction in CIT training classes. This policy change should be reversed and a full schedule should be resumed. We hope that the Civilian Oversight Commission will consider our requests with the seriousness they deserve. If we may be of help, please contact Brittney Weissman, Chief Executive Officer, at brittney@namilacc.org.

Our hearts and condolences go to the Briceno family.

Respectfully yours,

Mark Gale
Criminal Justice Chair

Brittney Weissman
CEO

CC: Sheriff Alex Villanueva, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department via Lt. John Satterfield
Lt. John Gannon, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department
Dr. Jonathan Sherin, Department of Mental Health
Alene Tchekmedyian, Los Angeles Times
Honorable Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles County