

LOS ANGELES LIVES LOST

A REPORT OF IN-CUSTODY DEATHS IN LOS ANGELES
COUNTY BETWEEN 2016- 2025



JUSTICE**LA**

LOS ANGELES IS EXPERIENCING AN IN-CUSTODY DEATHS CRISIS – AND IT’S ONLY GETTING WORSE

Despite the efforts of family members, advocates, and oversight bodies, 2025 was one of the deadliest years on record.

This report examines in-custody deaths in LA county in the years between 2016 and 2025, highlighting the increases in deaths despite decreases in population, when deaths occur, and the demographics of those who died.

REPORT DISCLAIMER AND CONSIDERATIONS

Finding reliable data on in-custody deaths is a distinct challenge. The only readily available data we have access to is from LASD's self-reports. Yet, they have consistently proven to be unreliable, dishonest, and unaccountable.

NUMBERS REPORTED BY SHERIFF DEPARTMENTS ARE NOT ACCURATE

Sheriff departments have historically inaccurately documented: cause of death, manner of death, ethnicity, gender, time of death, location of death, and quantity of deaths that occur in-custody.

The heart-breaking stories of John Horton, Stanley Wilson Jr, and Jalani Lovett reveal a pattern of the LASD lying to avoid accountability. While these are individual stories, we know there are many more victims of LASD’s obfuscation.

Research reflects this as well. A recent UCLA study found that at least **one-third of California counties failed to meet full legal reporting requirements in 2023.**

Poor law enforcement oversight enables inaccurate reporting. Despite state and federal in-custody death reporting requirements, there are almost no consequences for fraudulence. Counties can easily under-report and under-investigate to obstruct justice and evade accountability. The few independent oversight bodies we do have in California often lack the power, or the will, to push for the necessary changes themselves.

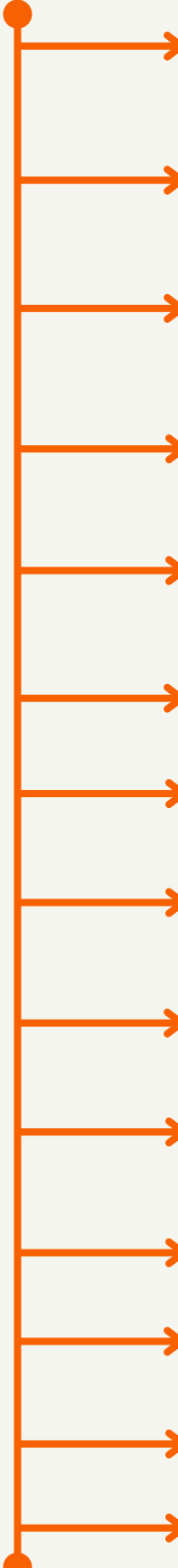
DEFINITIONS

In-Custody Death: Pursuant to Penal Code 10008 “In-custody death” means the death of a person who is detained, under arrest, or is in the process of being arrested, is en route to be incarcerated, or is incarcerated at a municipal or county jail, state prison, state-run boot camp prison, boot camp prison that is contracted out by the state, any state or local contract facility, or other local or state correctional facility, including any juvenile facility. “In-custody death” also includes deaths that occur in medical facilities while in law-enforcement custody.

Pretrial Detention: When someone who is accused of a criminal offense is held in custody, while awaiting the outcome of their case. They are often detained simply because they cannot afford to pay bail.

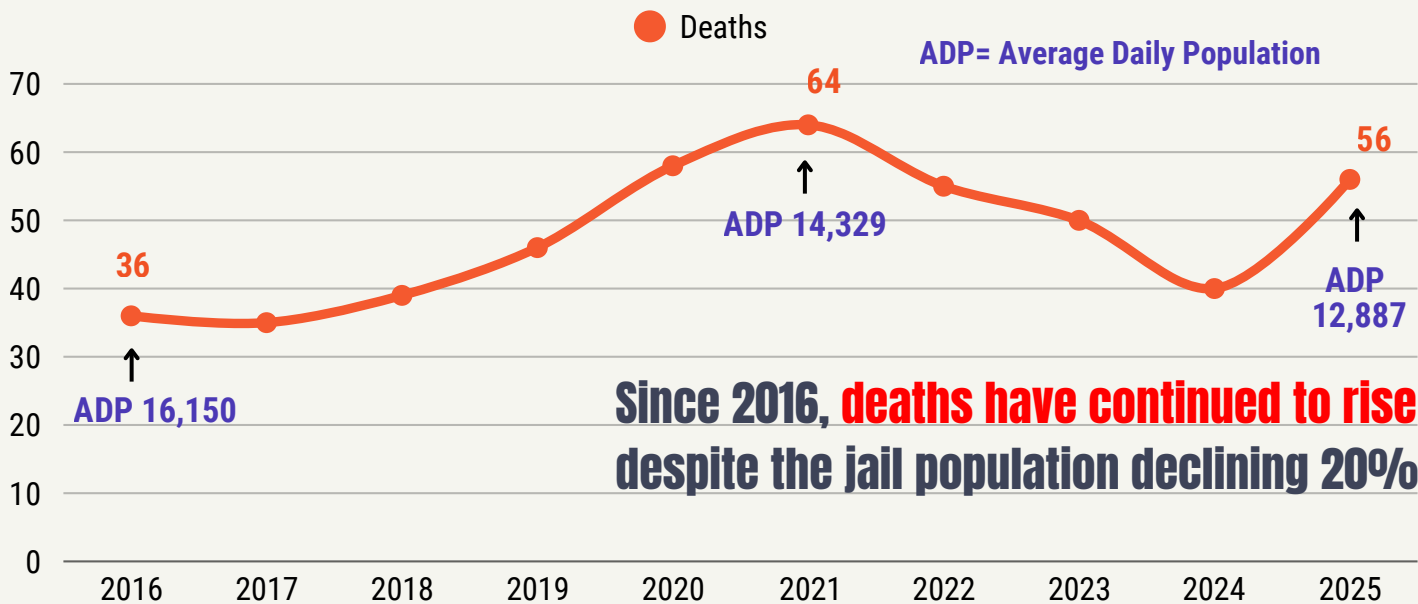
PREVIOUS WORK

BRIEF TIMELINE OF DECARCERATION ADVOCACY IN LOS ANGELES

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- THE COALITION TO END SHERIFF VIOLENCE (C2ESV), FOUGHT TO CREATE THE SHERIFF CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT COMMISSION (COC).**
DECEMBER 9TH, 2014
 - LA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS (BOS) APPROVED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW WOMEN'S JAIL AND A MENTAL HEALTH JAIL.**
SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2015
 - LA COUNTY BOS CREATED THE OFFICE OF DIVERSION AND RE-ENTRY (ODR) TO DIVERT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OUT OF JAILS.**
SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2015
 - JUSTICE LA IS FORMED, MADE UP OF GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS, ORGANIZERS, ADVOCATES AND IMPACTED COMMUNITIES.**
FEBRUARY 3RD, 2017
 - LA COUNTY BOS SCRAPS WOMEN'S JAIL AND DECIDES TO REPLACE MEN'S CENTRAL JAIL WITH A LOCKED MENTAL HEALTH JAIL**
FEBRUARY 12TH, 2019
 - ORGANIZERS STOP THE CONSTRUCTION OF MENTAL HEALTH JAIL**
AUGUST 22ND, 2019
 - ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION WORKGROUP FINAL REPORT**
MARCH 10TH, 2020
 - LA COUNTY BOS VOTES TO CLOSE MCJ WITHOUT A REPLACEMENT WITHIN ONE YEAR**
JULY 7, 2020
 - MEASURE J PASSES BY ALMOST 60% OF THE VOTE**
NOVEMBER, 2020
 - CLOSE MCJ WORKGROUP FINAL REPORT (PLAN TO CLOSE MCJ WITHIN 2 YEARS)**
MARCH 30TH, 2021
 - SHERIFF VILLANUEVA. KICKED OUT**
JULY, 2024
 - BAIL PRE-ARRAIGNMENT RELEASE PROTOCOL LAWSUIT**
JULY, 2024
 - INMATE RECEPTION CENTER LAWSUIT**
JULY, 2024
 - AG BONTA SUES LASD OVER INHUMAN JAIL CONDITIONS**
SEPTEMBER 8TH, 2025

OVERVIEW OF DEATHS IN-CUSTODY

DEATHS OVER TIME



Since 2016, deaths have continued to rise despite the jail population declining 20%.

NOTE: LASD reports process of arrest deaths to the DOJ as in-custody deaths but *doesn't* include them on their public ICD tracker. These are included in our report, making the *total* 2025 deaths 56, not 46.

2025 has the highest rate of deaths in jails in the last decade

DESPITE EXPERIENCING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC, THE DEATH RATE IN 2021 WAS LOWER THAN IN 2025.

2021	3.56 deaths per 1,000 people incarcerated
2025	3.57 deaths per 1,000 people incarcerated

CUSTODY STATUS

80% OF DEATHS OCCUR PRETRIAL.

52% OF DEATHS OCCUR AFTER BOOKING, BUT BEFORE TRIAL.

WHEN DEATHS OCCUR	# OF DEATHS
Process of Arrest	125
Awaiting Booking	5
Booked - No Charges Filed	32
Booked - Awaiting Trial	216
Out to Court	2
Sentenced	97
In Transit	1
Other	1

DEMOGRAPHICS

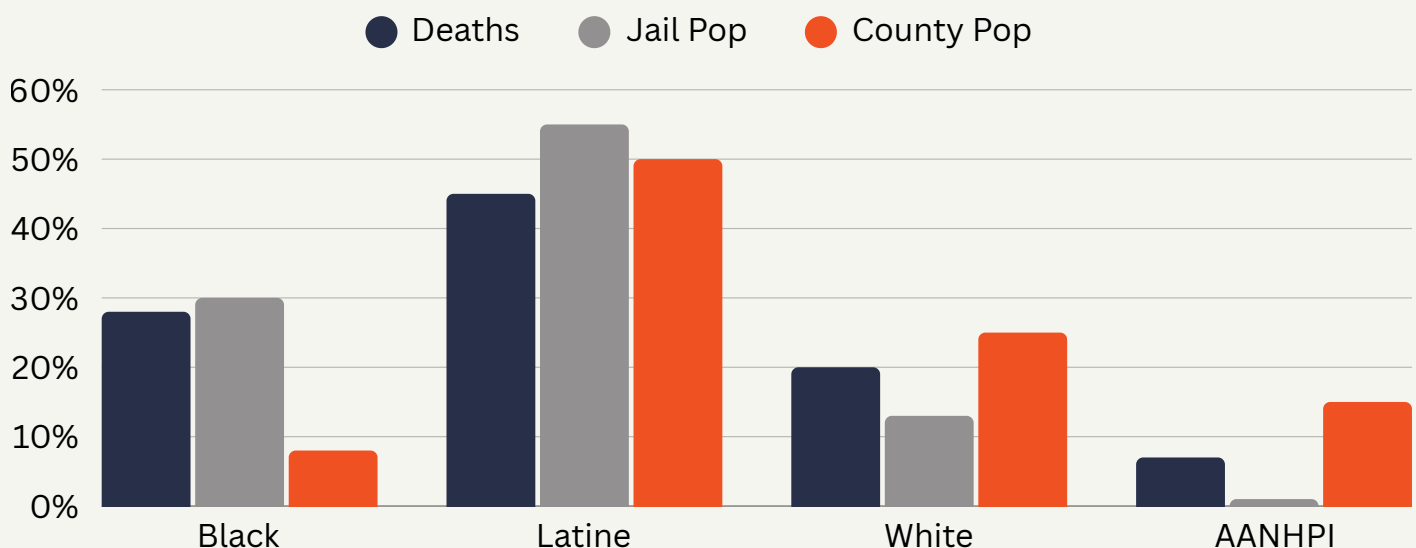
AGE

17	1 person	0%
18-24	36 people	8%
25-34	118 people	25%
35-44	107 people	22%
45-54	88 people	18%
55-64	76 people	16%
65-74	36 people	8%
75+	17 people	4%

The youngest person who died while in Sheriff's custody was **17** and the oldest was **91**.

RACE/ ETHNICITY

Total In-Custody Deaths vs. Population Averages



Though only **8%** of Los Angeles residents identify as Black, **30%** of the local jail population and **28% of those that die in sheriff custody are Black**.

The data displayed does not accurately reflect people who identify with multiple races/ethnicities, and [research shows](#) that [Latinx people are routinely misidentified ethnically and racially](#), likely skewing the results and any conclusions we might draw.

THE COMMUNITY DEMANDS ACTION

PROTECT VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

49% OF THOSE INCARCERATED IN LA JAILS HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS.

Fund county programs such as ODR, and support diversion programs for the P2 jail population.

Most importantly: DO NOT GIVE MORE MONEY TO THE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT TO EXPAND THE JAILS OR INCREASE INFRASTRUCTURE.

53% OF THOSE INCARCERATED IN LA JAILS ARE PRETRIAL.

The *quickest* way to save lives in-custody is to return to zero dollar bail, as LA did during COVID-19. over half of the jail population is legally innocent, yet still facing the life-threatening conditions inside.

IN 2025, 14% OF ALL IN-CUSTODY DEATHS WERE 65+ YEARS OLD.

The 2024-2025 LASD's budget was \$4.1 billion. 24% went to its jail system, the majority of which was used for salaries.

Increasing funding to Medi-Cal, housing, and mental health services will provide critical assistance to high risk populations.

REAL ACCOUNTABILITY

LASD has shown time and time again that they will not willingly project those incarcerated. We need oversight bodies, such as the Sybil Brand Commission, that can require compliance without a lawsuit from the state or otherside legal organizations.

Most importantly, we need the Board of Supervisors to hold itself accountable to the promise of Men's Central Jail without a replacement, and implement Alternatives to Incarceration.

OVERSIGHT WITHOUT ENFORCEMENT WILL NOT LEAD TO CHANGE. CLOSE MCJ !

CITATIONS

- 1 The stories of [John Horton](#), [Stanley Wilson Jr](#), and [Jalani Lovett](#), all of whom died while in LASD custody at Men's Central Jail.
- 2 Butler, M., Christie, E., Eden, N., Hogan, A., Nuñez, C., Parker-Chavez, R. (2025). From "*Oversight Theater*" to *Accountable Systems: Improving In-Custody Death Investigation Governance in California*. Assigned Policy Project. University of California, Los Angeles Luskin School of Public Affairs.
- 3 Department of Justice. (2024, January) and (2026, January). Data Received Pursuant to California Public Records Act on all In-Custody deaths between 2011 and 2025. Criminal Justice Statistics Center.
- 4 Percentage of total deaths from the above DOJ PRA
- 5 2022 Jail population data from Vera Institute Incarceration Trends Dashboard: Los Angeles (Vera data since updated to 2024)
- 6 [Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders](#)
- 7 www.vera.org/carefirstLA
- 8 ceo.lacounty.gov/budget/