

Inmate deaths renew scrutiny of jails

Nine people have died in L.A. County lockups this year. Sheriff vows changes.

By Salvador Hernandez

Nine people have died inside L.A. County jails so far this year, an alarming number for the Sheriff's Department as it continues to face a lawsuit from the state over the conditions in local lock-ups.

Sheriff's officials said they are continuing to make changes, hoping to reduce the number of in-custody deaths and to care for an inmate population that is increasingly struggling with medical and mental health issues.

"Every time I get notified that someone in my care has passed away, it's like a kick in the groin," Sheriff Robert Luna said during a brief interview. "It's not what you want to hear."

Seven inmates died in January, according to the Sheriff's Department, and two more deaths have occurred so far in February. The causes of all nine deaths are pending autopsy reports.

The rate is on pace with 2025, when nine deaths were reported by the end of February and there were 46 in-custody deaths for the year. In 2024, the Sheriff's Department reported 32 deaths.

"It's not off to a good start," Luna said.

The Sheriff Civilian Oversight Commission will investigate the county's Correctional Health Services during its next meeting, specifically eight suicides and 10 drug-related deaths that occurred in 2025, said Hans Johnson, commission chair.

Officials at Correctional [See Jails, A7]



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NATHAN POSNER/Anadolu

ATTY. GEN. Pam Bondi, top, testifies before a House committee. At one point, Bondi refused to apologize to Jeffrey Epstein victims, above, who were in the room.

Bondi defiant over handling of Epstein case

She won't apologize to victims, says critics — including in GOP — engage in 'theatrics.'

By Ana Ceballos and Gavin J. Quinton

WASHINGTON — U.S. Atty. Gen. Pam Bondi repeatedly sparred with lawmakers on Wednesday as she was pressed over the Justice Department's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein investigation and faced demands for greater transparency in the high-profile case.

Bondi accused Democrats and at least one Republican on the House Judiciary Committee of engaging in "theatrics" as she fielded questions about redaction errors made by the Justice Department when it released millions of files related to the Epstein case last month.

The attorney general at one point acknowledged that mistakes had been made as the Justice Department tried to comply with a federal law that required it to review, redact and publicize millions of files within a 30-day period. Given the tremendous task at hand, she said the "error rate was

very low" and that fixes were made when issues were encountered.

Her testimony on the Epstein files, however, was mostly punctuated by dramatic clashes with lawmakers — exchanges that occurred as eight Epstein survivors attended the hearing.

In one instance, Bondi refused to apologize to Epstein victims in the room, saying she would not "get into the gutter" with partisan requests from Democrats.

In another exchange, Bondi declined to say how many perpetrators tied to the Epstein case are being investigated by the Justice Department. And at one point, Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) said the Trump administration was engaging in a "cover-up," prompting Bondi to tell him that he was suffering from "Trump derangement syndrome."

The episodes underscore the extent to which the Epstein saga has roiled members of Congress. It has long been a political cudgel for Democrats, but after millions of files were released last month, offering the most detail yet of Epstein's crimes, Republicans once unwilling to criticize Trump administration officials are growing more testy, as was [See Testimony, A6]

Artists call for Wasserman to go

Casey Wasserman, the sports and entertainment executive who is heading Los Angeles' 2028 Olympics organizing committee, is facing calls to step down from his music agency after his sexually charged emails surfaced in the Epstein files. With artists such as Chappell Roan leaving and top agents reportedly demanding a change in leadership, talent managers and touring executives say they expect imminent change — possibly a sale of the music firm.

One manager for a major Wasserman artist, who is not a Wasserman

The executive faces pressure to leave his music agency after surfacing in Epstein files

By August Brown

employee and who spoke to The Times on condition of anonymity to preserve their relationships within the firm, said agents there informed them that Wasserman plans to step down from the music agency and spin it off into a separate company with a new name.

Representatives for Wasserman did not respond to requests for comment. Providence Equity Partners, a private equity group with significant investments in Wasserman, did not return requests for comment on the situation. [See Wasserman, A13]

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE: L.A. Olympic committee backs Wasserman amid Epstein fallout. **NATION, A8**

Raman pivots to protect LAPD

Council member who sought cuts now calls, as mayoral hopeful, to maintain size of force.

By Noah Goldberg and David Zahniser

Two days after her surprise entry into the Los Angeles mayor's race, Nithya Raman staked out her position on public safety, saying she doesn't want the Police Department to lose more officers.

"We need to maintain the size of our police force and grapple with the fact that even the size of our existing police force is not enough to respond to 911 calls in a timely fashion," she said Monday in an interview with NBC Los Angeles.

Raman's statements represent a considerable evolution from 2020, when she became the first person elected to the City Council with the support of the Democratic Socialists of America. "Defund the police," she declared at one point during her campaign.

As a council member, Raman has navigated a tightrope on the issue, responding to the wishes of her DSA supporters but also other constituents concerned about crime.

Just three weeks ago, she voted against the hiring of 170 additional police officers sought by Mayor Karen Bass, a former ally who is now her opponent in the June 2 primary.

"I've voted for police budgets when they have maintained appropriate levels of investment and are fiscally responsible, and that's what I would continue to do as mayor," Raman said Wednesday in a statement to The Times.

A Bass campaign spokesperson criticized Raman over her latest statements, saying her vote against police hiring last month would have caused the LAPD's ranks to decrease even more.

"This is what typical politicians do; they say one thing while doing another," said [See Raman, A7]



MYUNG J. CHUN/Los Angeles Times

SUPERVISOR Hilda Solis, center, introduces a ballot measure to raise the sales tax rate by a half-cent.

County leaders want to raise the sales tax

A half-cent levy to help offset federal health funding cuts will go on June ballot.

By Rebecca Ellis

L.A. County voters will be asked this June to raise the sales tax rate by a half-cent to soften the blow of federal funding cuts on the region's public health system.

The county Board of Supervisors voted 4 to 1 Tuesday to put the sales tax on the ballot. County officials estimate it would generate \$1 billion per year to replenish the shrinking budgets of local hospitals and clinics. The tax, if approved by voters this summer, would last for five years.

The supervisors say the increased tax — a half-cent of every dollar spent —

would offset major funding cuts in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which is expected to slash more than \$2 billion from the county's budget for health services over the next three years.

"Millions of people look to us to step up even when the federal government has walked away," said Supervisor Holly Mitchell, who introduced the ballot proposal along with Supervisor Hilda Solis.

The tax was pushed by Restore Healthcare for Angelenos, a coalition of healthcare workers and advocates, who contend it is necessary to ward off mass layoffs of healthcare workers and keep emergency rooms open.

Mitchell said she was trying to make sure supervisors learned their lesson from the closure of Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center [See Tax, A7]

'Violates all the rules': Why the Guthrie case is so tough

By Richard Winton and Hannah Fry

Investigators trying to find Nancy Guthrie are posed with a daunting but familiar challenge in law enforcement: how to identify a masked person.

Authorities got a huge break Tuesday with the release of footage of an armed individual wearing a balaclava, gloves and a backpack approaching the front door of Guthrie's Tucson-area home and tampering with a Nest camera the morning she was abducted.

The video led to a flood of

new tips, about 4,000 in the last day, according to the Pima County Sheriff's Department. A 36-year-old man was detained after a traffic stop south of Tucson but was released hours later. Deputies and FBI forensics experts and agents searched his family's home overnight but did not locate Guthrie.

Law enforcement experts said the video represents the first big lead in the case but that unmasking the person will be a challenge. During the COVID-19 pandemic, police departments around the nation struggled to solve crimes — even ones captured on video — carried

out by people wearing masks. In many cases, they used data from electronics and geocoding to help build cases.

But experts say the real game changer in the Guthrie case will come if someone recognizes the person in the footage. Their clothing, gait and small details such as mannerisms can give a person away.

"There is technology which is helpful but not conclusive," said University of Hawaii Police Chief Andrew Black, a former FBI special agent in charge in Tucson. "People who know the indi- [See Guthrie, A6]

Abrupt Texas airspace closure

A dispute between the Pentagon and the FAA over laser use caused an airspace closure over El Paso. **NATION, A5**

Instagram boss testifies in L.A.

Judge threatens to expel weeping parents during the trial over social media's effects on kids. **BUSINESS, A11**

Weather
Periods of sun.
L.A. Basin: 67/49. **B6**

Markets **A13**
Opinion Voices **A14**



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MILAN-CORTINA OLYMPICS



ROBERT GAUTHIER/Los Angeles Times

A BITTERSWEET SILVER

American ice dancers Madison Chock and Evan Bates, left, settle for second best behind France, center, and ahead of Canada's team. **SPORTS, D1**