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NEWS

Long Beach must rehire officers it accused of lying in police reports, commission rules

by **Jeremiah Dobruck**

23 hours ago Updated 4 hours ago



Former LBPD officers Dedier Reyes (left) and David Salcedo seen during the opening of their trial at Clara Shortridge Foltz Courthouse on charges of falsifying a police report. Photos by Maison Tran.

Two Long Beach police officers fired for allegedly lying in their official reports must be rehired, a city employment panel ruled Friday — a stunning repudiation of the charges that previously upended criminal cases and bolstered accusations of brutality.

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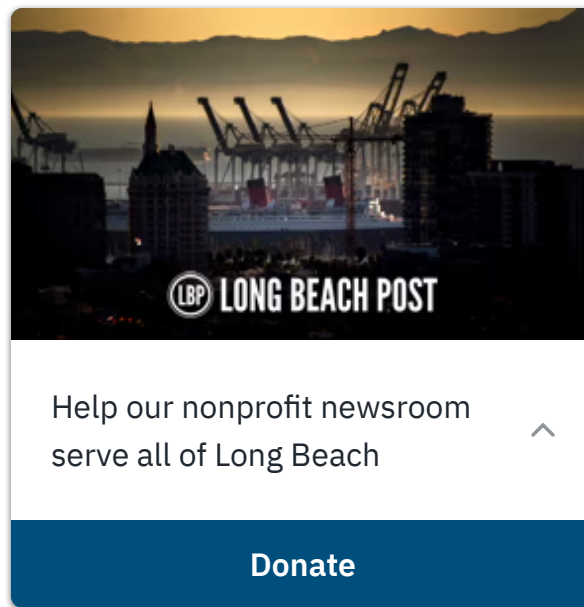
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Service Commission means officers Dedier Reyes and they missed since their dismissal and are entitled to

return to jobs on the force that are comparable to their previous positions as patrol officers, according to Reyes' attorney Benjamin Karabian.

"It's been a very long and difficult journey for Mr. Reyes, but he is very pleased at the commission's ruling," Karabian said. Reyes and Salcedo were also acquitted last year of criminal charges related to the allegations.

Reyes, who was the training officer for the less-experienced Salcedo, was accused of lying and perjuring himself when he wrote in a February 2018 police report that he recognized two gang members standing outside a Long Beach taqueria and then saw one go inside and ditch a bag containing a gun.



Video from inside the taqueria showed Reyes arrested the wrong gang member, and investigators questioned how he could've seen what happened inside the building while he was driving by as he claimed.

Salcedo also reported recognizing the gang members and seeing the bag with the gun but later told internal affairs investigators those were Reyes' observations, not his own.

Both said the inaccuracies were honest mistakes, not lies.

"I completely will own up to this, like I have in the past, of any other mistakes I've made," Reyes told internal affairs investigators, according to an interview transcript released during a separate civil lawsuit. "And I definitely made a mistake in this police report. But it was the best of my recollection"

For a time, it appeared the Long Beach police brass accepted this explanation.

Top LBPd officials were briefed on the video, the reports and the officers' internal affairs interviews, but they "chose to leave them on patrol in a position where they'd be writing reports and making arrests," Karabian said. He said then-District Attorney Jackie Lacey also reviewed the case and decided the situation didn't merit criminal charges.

That changed when new District Attorney George Gascón, who campaigned on a wave of police-reform sentiment, moved to file charges in 2021.

Nearly four years after the events in question, Reyes and Salcedo were arrested on suspicion of falsifying police reports. The department also moved to fire them, a decision that Karabian alleges was politically driven by then-LBPD Chief Robert Luna's desire to be seen as a reformer as he prepared a run for Los Angeles County Sheriff.

"If this was not Chief Luna running for sheriff and George Gascón, this would've never happened," he said. Luna did not respond to a message Friday.



Long Beach Police Chief Robert Luna announces he will be running for Los Angeles County Sheriff as protesters fill the back with signs at a press conference in Signal Hill Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

The arrests made headlines across the region and stirred legal chaos behind the scenes.

City Prosecutor Doug Haubert estimated his office dropped two dozen misdemeanor cases undercut by Reyes and Salcedo's arrest, and the District Attorney's office agreed to vacate the conviction of a man serving 39 years in prison in part because it relied heavily on Reyes' now tainted testimony.

That man, Miguel Vargas, was convicted in 2011 of assault on a peace officer for allegedly pointing a gun as he ran away from Reyes and another officer.

Vargas is now suing, alleging he'd already tossed away the gun and was simply trying to get away when Reyes and the other officer shot him multiple times from behind.

Much like in the taqueria case, the lawsuit alleges, Reyes lied about what he saw to cover his tracks. Attorneys for Reyes have denied the allegations in court papers.

Attorney Narine Mkrtchyan, who fought to unearth Reyes' disciplinary record in a police brutality lawsuit that resulted in a \$499,800 settlement, said she was shocked to learn he'll be back on the police force.

"This officer was such a problem and such a troublemaker," she said.

Former El Monte Police Chief David Reynoso, whom Mkrtchyan hired as an expert, wrote in court documents that Reyes had an "astonishing high number" of complaints against him.

In a 10-year span, departmental records showed, he used physical force to control people 25 times, collected 20 complaints from citizens and was suspended twice by the LBPD for disobeying a direct order from his sergeant and for pushing a woman. The vast majority of complaints against Reyes were not substantiated and he was within department policies each time he used force, according to LBPD records.

Nevertheless, Reynoso wrote, Luna should have taken Reyes off the streets as soon as the accusations about his dishonesty surfaced. Had he done so, he said, Mkrtchyan's client never would've had his elbow fractured during a rough arrest when he was wrongfully accused of participating in a fight outside a Pine Avenue bar.

The Long Beach Police Department did not immediately respond to questions about where they plan to assign Reyes and Salcedo.

The City Attorney's office declined to say whether it would pursue a judge's order to block the Civil Service's decision — something it's done in the past.

Both Reyes and Salcedo plan to stay in law enforcement, according to Karabian.

“I believe there’s going to be great value in having them on the police force — and on the Long Beach Police force,” he said.
