

Under Color of Authority: An Examination of Police Conduct and Accountability in Long Beach

As racial justice protests erupted across the nation in the wake of George Floyd's death—including a massive gathering in Downtown Long Beach—the Post undertook a multifaceted investigation into the conduct of the city's police force toward those it is sworn to protect.

The aim of the effort: to move beyond the anecdotal and document systemic issues that could provide a potential roadmap for reform.

In that pursuit, Long Beach Post reporter Jeremiah Dobruck obtained tens of thousands of records from the state's justice department in his data-focused examination of racial profiling and excessive force in Long Beach.

One extensive trove of documents provided detailed demographic information on 40,523 people who were stopped or detained by Long Beach police in 2019. Those records, obtained through the California Public Records Act, showed that officers pulled over Black and Latino drivers—often for minor infractions—at disproportionately high rates and subjected them to more intensive scrutiny than individuals of other races. Dobruck found, for example, that officers ordered or physically removed Black drivers from their vehicles more than twice as often as white drivers.

The Post's stories represented the first time any organization, including the Long Beach Police Department, had analyzed these records, which are maintained by the state under a new law to determine the possible extent of racial profiling by California law enforcement agencies.

To ensure the accuracy of its findings, the Post reached out to data scientists and mathematicians—and then made the information available to readers for their own analysis. Post operations chief Dennis Dean created a searchable database from more than 1.6 million pieces of raw information, including the race, gender, sexual identification, age and disability status of individuals who were stopped or detained.

Reporter Alena Maschke, meanwhile, created another public-facing database in her examination of the political influence of the police department's powerful union, long accused by community activists of blocking potential reforms.

Drawing information from local and state sources, the database included five years of union contributions to candidates, measures and political action committees. Maschke's

accompanying story explored which candidates and elected officials have benefited most from the union's largess.

One of the Post's most impactful undertakings of the year was its months-long exploration of the city's Citizen Police Complaint Commission, created 30 years ago by Long Beach voters to hold the police department more accountable. But as Dobruck and City Hall reporter Jason Ruiz concluded in their meticulously documented piece, the commission now is largely "a cautionary tale in these days of renewed calls for systemic police reform in Long Beach and beyond."

Among their findings: a string of city managers in Long Beach—privately working hand-in-hand with police executives—have frustrated the CPCC's work over the years by rejecting hundreds of recommendations of officer discipline. After the Post's report—and amid continuing calls for reform—city officials moved to strengthen the commission. One crucial change: the city said commissioners would now be given access to the internal affairs statements of officers accused of misconduct, which they had previously been denied.

The Post is proud to submit these and other efforts in the Public Service Category. We believe that our enterprising reporting, analysis and commitment to transparency has helped sharpen the public debate about the future of law enforcement in Long Beach at a time when residents want and deserve actionable answers.

[Being Black means you're more likely to be stopped, searched by Long Beach police, new data shows](https://lbpost.com/news/traffic-stop-black-search-lbpd-ripa)

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[How we reported the story: Landmark data release sheds new light on LBPD stops](https://lbpost.com/news/staff-blog/how-we-reported-the-story-landmark-data-release-she)

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[ds-new-light-on-lbpd-stops](https://lbpost.com/news/staff-blog/how-we-reported-the-story-landmark-data-release-she)**

[Black riders disproportionately stopped for fare evasion on Long Beach public transit, data shows](https://lbpost.com/news/black-riders-metro-bus-racial-profiling-long-beach)

<https://lbpost.com/news/black-riders-metro-bus-racial-profiling-long-beach>

[Mentally ill man 'needed help, not beatings,' says attorney announcing lawsuit against LBPD \(This is a daily story that used racial profiling data for context\)](https://lbpost.com/news/eugene-martindale-lawsuit-lbpd-baton-beating-video)

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[Live chat about how we reported the story](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=303834851020981&ref=watch_permalink)

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Statistics show LBPD seriously injures people at high rate, but police say database is flawed

<https://lbpost.com/news/lbpd-use-force-hurt-seriously-kill-ursus-doj-database>

Shattered promise of police oversight still haunts Long Beach 30 years later

<https://lbpost.com/news/shattered-promise-of-police-oversight-still-haunts-long-beach-30-years-later>

Editorial: To the mayor and City Council: Unlock the handcuffs on police reform

<https://lbpost.com/voices/to-the-mayor-and-city-council-unlock-the-handcuffs-on-police-reform>

In major shift, city to allow oversight commission to see police officer statements

<https://lbpost.com/news/in-major-shift-city-to-allow-oversight-commission-to-see-police-officer-statements>

Elected officials count on police unions for financial support—can they still hold police accountable?

<https://lbpost.com/news/elected-officials-count-on-police-unions-for-financial-support-can-they-still-hold-police-accountable>

How much has the Long Beach police union given to political campaigns? Find out using our database.

<https://lbpost.com/news/how-much-has-the-long-beach-police-union-given-to-political-campaigns-find-out-using-our-database>

Activists want to cut police budgets; here's what the LBPD spends its money on

<https://lbbusinessjournal.com/activists-want-to-cut-police-budgets-heres-what-the-lbpd-spends-its-money-on>