

Los Angeles Punishes Police Official Over Clash at Demonstration



Stefano Paltera/Associated Press

Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa comforted Jose Perez on Sunday at MacArthur Park, where, Mr. Perez said, he was injured at an immigration rally last week.

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By JENNIFER STEINHAUER

Published: May 8, 2007

Correction Appended

LOS ANGELES, May 7 — The city's mayor and its police chief said Monday that one of the highest-ranking officials in the Police Department would be demoted and transferred in the wake of a violent confrontation between officers and demonstrators at an [immigration](#) rally last week.

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Rick Loomis/Los Angeles Times, via Associated Press

Last week, police officers used forceful tactics on people including a photographer for KCAL-TV in Los Angeles, Carl Stein.

The police official, Deputy Chief Cayler Carter Jr., a 30-year veteran of the department, will be reduced one rank, to commander, and moved out of the Central Bureau, which he currently heads.

Mr. Carter has been ordered to work from home while investigations into the episode proceed. He was the highest-ranking police official present last Tuesday when officers, in response to a group of agitators who were trying to provoke them with taunts and thrown objects, fired 148 rubber bullets and used other forceful tactics to break up the immigration rally, in MacArthur Park. Several spectators and journalists were injured, as were a number of officers.

The second in command at the scene, Cmdr. Louis Gray, will also be transferred out of the Central Bureau, a 1,700-member unit that, according to the department's Web site, serves more than a million residents in an area roughly the size of the District of Columbia.

"I have to be comfortable with the leadership around me," [William J. Bratton](#), the police chief, said at a City Hall news conference with Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa.

The demotion of the two officials came a day after 60 members of an elite squad, the Metropolitan Division, were removed from street duty as a result of the clash. Mr. Bratton said they were unlikely to return to the division, made up of highly skilled, specialized officers who are trained in relative isolation from neighborhood streets and are on guard for riot conditions.

The episode at MacArthur Park underscored problems that have continued to dog the department deep into the term of Mr. Bratton, who rode into town five years ago with a plan to reduce crime, improve the department's relationship with the city's myriad ethnic groups and change its essential culture.

Still, the swiftness of Monday's response by him and Mr. Villaraigosa, and their profuse apologies in the last few days, signaled their determination to break with the department's long history of disproportionate response to events on the street and defensiveness to criticism.

That the move against the department officials was announced at City Hall, by the mayor and the police chief together, was a sign that Mr. Bratton, whose appointment is up for renewal this summer, enjoys the unqualified support of Mr. Villaraigosa.

The civilians who oversee the department also made their support clear. "I personally still have confidence in Chief Bratton," John W. Mack, president of the Board of Police Commissioners, said at the news conference.

Mr. Mack will play a major role in whether Mr. Bratton gets a second term. And although he said he viewed the events in MacArthur Park as "a major setback for the department," he praised the chief for not being defensive about the resulting criticism.

Mr. Villaraigosa, who was out of the country on the day of the rally, appeared eager Monday to demonstrate that he was firmly in control of his city and the way the department polices it.

"Accountability begins at the top," Mr. Villaraigosa said, adding: "Let me be clear about this. When I say accountability starts at the top, it starts with me. Today we're taking decisive action."

Though the outcome of several investigations is pending, it appears that a group of roughly 50 agitators, throwing bottles at the police, were pushed by them into the park among nonviolent protesters, rather than being isolated and confined. What followed, videos of the demonstration suggest, were widespread and fairly random acts of aggressive police tactics against a broad swath of people in the park, including reporters.

"You see in the highly specialized, aggressive units the lack of judgment about appropriate and proportionate use of force," said Connie Rice, a civil rights lawyer who, appointed by Mr. Bratton and the civilian commissioners, led a committee that studied the widely publicized corruption in the department's Rampart Division.

Ms. Rice said she was glad the department's leadership had taken a firm stand. Referring to a former Los Angeles police chief known for tough methods, she said, "It is important to send a strong signal that this lack of judgment and this mindless kind of tactic may have been O.K. under Daryl Gates, but it's not O.K. in 21st-century L.A."

"The question for me, though," she added, "is not the individuals who get disciplined, but do they understand the mentality that led them to do what they did?"

Correction: May 15, 2007

A picture caption last Tuesday with an article about disciplinary action against Los Angeles police officials after a clash at an immigration rally referred incompletely to a scene at the rally, where officers used force to break up the crowd. The man pictured on his knees with police officers standing over him was a photographer for KCAL-TV in Los Angeles, Carl Stein — not one of the people who the police said had tried to provoke them.

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