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November 1, 2025

Mayor Karen Bass
Office of the Mayor
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90012

Council President Marqueece Harris-Dawson
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90012

Councilwoman Traci Park
Council District 11
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90012

Dear Mayor Bass, Councilman Dawson and Councilwoman Park:

The Palisades fire burned 23,448 acres, killed 12 people and destroyed 6,837 structures, making it the tenth deadliest and third-most destructive California wildfire on record and the most destructive to occur in the history of the City of Los Angeles.

This correspondence is forwarded from active and retired Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) Chief Officers and Captains. Personnel who contributed to this letter have over 250 combined years of experience with seniority ranging from 10-30 years on the LAFD.

On October 31, 2025, Mayor Bass directed Los Angeles City Fire Department Interim Fire Chief Villanueva to "thoroughly investigate this week's report regarding the Lachman Fire".

We have no faith in Chief Villanueva to conduct an accurate, comprehensive and impartial investigate and report related to the Lachman fire. Chief Villanueva will be leaving the LAFD in the immediate future when Deputy Chief Jaime Moore is confirmed by the City Council and officially appointed as the LAFD Fire Chief.

Furthermore, Chief Villanueva, the head of the LAFD admitted that he and his fire investigators did not know what a "holdover fire" was and that the Palisades fire was not a "rekindle" from the Lachman fire. Anyone with any wildland fire experience knows the potential for holdover fires to occur if not properly cold trailed and mopped up, may result in a rekindle which is exactly what happened at the Palisades fire.

Any competent wildland fire command officer is aware of the Tunnel fire in Oakland and the Lahaina fire in Maui, Hawaii (each wildland rekindles) which resulted in deaths and property damage like the Palisades fire and the subsequent lessons learned from those catastrophic incidents.

Mayor Bass stated that the investigation “ will continue to guide our ongoing reforms, which include enhancing pre-deployment protocols, strengthening interagency coordination, upgrading communications technology and expanding training at all staff levels.

While we agree that a thorough and comprehensive investigation needs to be conducted along with analysis, written report and recommendations for the Lachman and Palisades Fire, we offer the following observations, comments and recommendations related to the Mayors directive to Interim Fire Chief Ronnie Villanueva.

- 1. The Office of the Mayor and or the City Council should contract with the McChrystal Group who recently were contracted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to conduct an After-Action Report on the tragic and catastrophic Eaton fire which occurred in the Altadena area during the same time as the Palisades fire.**
- 2. The Office of the Mayor and or the City Council should establish and convene a Blue-Ribbon Panel to examine, evaluate and prepare recommendations related to the Lachman and Palisades Fires.**

A Blue-Ribbon panel is a committee of experts appointed to investigate and analyze a specific issue. In this case the primary issue would be LAFD preparedness, actions, policies, procedures and operations before, during and after the Lachman and Palisades fires.

A Blue-Ribbon panel was convened to examine, evaluate and make recommendations related to the LAX shooting in 2013. The panel consisted of law enforcement and homeland security experts and an honest, non-biased report with recommendations was published. The LAFD has a handful of active-duty personnel who could be considered subject matter experts in wildland urban interface, certainly not enough to complete an AAR of this magnitude.

Additionally, as evidenced in the recent 70-page LAFD Palisades Fire After Action Report (AAR), the report contained gaps and deficiencies in what has been called a less than satisfactory report that was completed solely by LAFD personnel.

The requested investigation and subsequent report should look at the actions of high-ranking command staff who made decisions at the Lachman and Palisades fire who currently are in the chain of command that directly and indirectly supervise any AAR investigator/author. This places any AAR investigator in an untenable position.

Former Fire Chief Kristin Crowley is currently an active Assistant Chief. Former Chief Deputy Orin Saunders is currently an active Assistant Chief. Current Deputy Chief Richard Fields is an active Deputy Chief.

The Incident Commander of the Palisades Fire (then Assistant Chief Joseph Everett) is now an active Chief Deputy. Chief Deputy Phillip Fligiel (former West Bureau Commander) is now in charge of all fire and ems resources in the City of Los Angeles. Chief Fligiel and Chief Everett are the second highest ranking Chief Officers in the department. It would present difficulties and could have a chilling effect if their subordinates are tasked with critically examining in minute detail, their actions, lack of actions and decisions made at the Lachman and Palisades fires.

All the above listed personnel were directly involved in the management of the Lachman and Palisades fires and played active roles in the catastrophic breakdown in command, communications and control of the Lachman and Palisades fires.

Orange County, the Orange County Fire Authority and Los Angeles County and Los Angeles County Fire Department have all convened expert, independent Blue-Ribbon panels to investigate, report and provide recommendations for significant wildland fire incidents occurring in their jurisdictions.

The following agencies/departments should be evaluated on their response and activities related to the Lachman and Palisades fires:

- Los Angeles City Fire Department
- Los Angeles Police Department (Evacuation)
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Los Angeles City Emergency Management Department

Sadly, the LAFD cannot conduct an accurate, non-biased AAR, nor should the current command staff be trusted to create an honest, un-biased and critical look at operations at the Lachman and Palisades fire.

It is respectfully recommended that a Blue-Ribbon panel composed of retired LAFD personnel and other outside subject matter experts in wildland firefighting who have the required knowledge, experience and ability to honestly analyze the actions of the LAFD at the Lachman and Palisades fire and produce a credible report.

Senior, experienced, retired LAFD personnel will give you an honest and worthwhile report which will benefit the citizens of Los Angeles that we swear an oath to protect and will undoubtedly improve future LAFD operations and better prepare us for the next major emergency wildland fire we will undoubtedly face. Fire Chief Moore will be able to contact retired LAFD personnel and provide suitable candidates for your Blue-Ribbon panel.

3. Grand Jury Request:

The role of Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury is to investigate and report on the operations accounts and records of county and city government agencies and other public entities to ensure they are functioning properly.

Mayor Bass stated that recent news and allegations related to the Lachman and Palisades fire was “tremendously alarming”. A full and complete investigation and review of all aspects of the Lachman and Palisades fire is essential to an accurate accounting of what occurred, and what can be done to prevent, respond, control, manage and command future wildland fire incidents such as the Lachman and Palisades fires.

It is the opinion of many LAFD personnel and residents affected by the fires that a request to the Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury to review LAFD operations before, during and after the Lachman and Palisades fires is prudent and appropriate and should be initiated by the office of the Mayor and or City Council.

4. Pre-Deployment Protocols.

The fact of the matter is that standard well established LAFD Pre-Deployment Protocols were not followed or executed. We have a robust pre-deployment algorithm that works when it is followed and put into play. Unfortunately in the case of the Palisades fire, it is the opinion of multiple senior Captains and Chief Officers that the breakdown in pre-deployment was not a faulty system; rather it was Chief Officers in command positions who lacked the requisite knowledge and experience to make the right calls (Deputy Chief Richard Fields, Deputy Chief Phillip Fliigiel, Assistant Chief Joseph Everett, Chief Deputy Jason Hing, and then Fire Chief Kristin Crowley). You can have the best program in the world; however, if you do not have experienced personnel with oversight to execute the program, then failures will occur as evidenced by the outcome of the Palisades fire.

5. Strengthening Inter-Agency Cooperation:

We have no idea why this is or could be an issue related to the Lachman and Palisades fires. At the Lachman fire, LA County Fire Department dispatched their wildland hand crews to assist with mop-up and cold trailing as has been their practice for years. At the Palisades fire, the LA County Fire Department and Cal-Fire sent and committed many personnel and resources during initial attack and for the duration of the incident.

About the only item that went right at the Palisades fire was the strong inter-agency cooperation, which had been established and maintained long before any of the Palisades command staff were even Chief Officers. This was a statement/idea communicated in the LAFD Palisades After Action Report which is an example of one of the flaws in the AAR (report).

6. Upgrading Communications Technology:

Experienced fire personnel (especially command officers) will wholeheartedly agree that communications play a significant part in the command and control of emergencies. Wildland fire experts (authors and contributors to this letter) will also state that at large, dynamic campaign wildland fires, it is not uncommon to have little to no communication due to geography, radio limitations etc.

In those cases, the fires are fought and successfully managed through experienced and battle tested personnel. Upgrading communications technology while sounding appealing and a fix for incidents that do not go well is mis-leading, especially when evaluating the Lachman and Palisades fire. The focus of the communication aspect of both wildland incidents, should be who talked to who, who issued orders, etc. It is the human aspect of communication that needs evaluation, not the technology piece.

7. Training:

We concur that this issue needs examination, analysis and recommendations. The majority of LAFD Chief Officers and Captains do not possess enough wildland firefighting training and most importantly experience.

In 2024, many Chief Officers that were wildland trained, qualified, and certified with numerous years of experience responding to and commanding large scale wildland fires retired. Then Fire Chief Crowley had the opportunity to create a program to temporarily hire back experienced retired Chief Officers to train, mentor and respond so catastrophic incidents, but failed to do so.

Younger Chief Officers for various reasons have not become at a minimum Wildland Fire Strike Team (STEN) Leader trained and certified. Many fire departments require that before promoting to and attaining the rank of Battalion Chief, that member shall be Strike Team Leader certified. The LAFD offers the classes free of charge and provided the opportunity for Chief Officers to become STEN certified; however, many choose to not participate. This needs to change.

Many of the command level officers charged with making critical decisions at the Lachman and Palisades fire lacked the required wildland training and experience to perform in a satisfactory manner. The area of training, experience and qualifications of command officers is a critical component of any evaluation/After Action Report. Again, this was lacking in the LAFD Palisades AAR.

8. LAFD Staffing and elimination of Firefighter positions in 2026 budget:

On May 10, 2025, retired and active LAFD personnel sent correspondence to you requesting and in fact urging you not to approve the recommendation in your budget to eliminate LAFD Emergency Incident Technicians (EIT's, see attached letter).

As you recall, EIT's make up 50 percent of the Battalion Command team. The Battalion Command Teams are the first Chief Officers that will arrive and take command and direct emergency operations at future wildland fires such as the Lachman and Palisades fires. Your budget has now cut in half critical command personnel that are required during the "Initial Attack" (IA) phase of dynamic emergency incidents.

Despite our pleas and written letters to the Mayor and the City Council requesting that the Emergency Incident Technicians who are part of Wildland fire response command teams not be eliminated (48 Firefighter positions) , they were anyways These positions are no longer available for the management, command and control of emergency incidents.

The elimination of EIT's will no doubt have a negative impact on all future emergency incidents where a Battalion Chief is dispatched to (all structure fires, all brush fires, all grass fires, significant emergency medical incidents with two or more Rescue Ambulances and multiple patients, hazardous materials incidents, drownings, earthquakes, collapsed structures, terrorist incidents and many planned large scale public events such as the Olympics, World Cup Soccer and the MLB World Series, recently held at Dodger Stadium.

Once again we urge you and the Council to restore the 48 Firefighter/Emergency Incident Technicians (front line first responders) that were eliminated in the most recent budget cycle and consider future budgetary requests and needs to support the mission of the LAFD, which is saving lives and property.

Then Fire Chief Crowley had the opportunity to create a program to temporarily hire back experienced retired Chief Officers to train, mentor and respond so catastrophic incidents, but failed to do so. Some of the failures at the Palisades fire can be attributed to the loss of over 100 senior and experienced Chief Officers in 2024, many of whom possessed extensive wildland firefighting experience.

Closing:

The Mayor, City Council, former Fire Chief Crowley and current LAFD Command Staff share in the overall responsibility for the lack of preparation, pre-deployment and inadequate response to the catastrophic Palisades fire.

Beginning with Fire Chief Kristin Crowley, and with a lack of governance, oversight and tacit approval from the LAFD Fire Commissioners that have been appointed by Mayor Bass, the LAFD has been under pressure to conform to diversity, equity and inclusion policies resulting in an inexperienced, weak and dysfunctional command staff (Fire Chief, Chief Deputies, Deputy Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs and some Battalion Chiefs).

The results of the past three years of mismanagement at the highest levels of the LAFD was dysfunction, chaos, poor decision making and an extremely negative outcome on the citizens of Los Angeles who were affected by the Palisades fire.

The media interviews of Chief Deputy Joseph Everett and Deputy Chief Richard Fields were telling in their stunning admission of the mistakes made, lack of command and control, poor to no decision making among the many other failures at the Lachman and Palisades fires. Truly a sad day for the citizens of Los Angeles who we failed and a sad day for the LAFD itself.

The LAFD members who authored and or contributed to this correspondence are beyond ashamed, upset, angry and sick over our inadequate and failed response to the Lachman and Palisades fires. Words cannot express our sorrow and apologies that we extend to all who have been and will continue to be affected by the Palisades fire.

The LAFD has not been properly staffed and equipped in multiple budget cycles, especially this most recent budget year, where we saw 48 Firefighter/EIT positions eliminated. Deputy Chief Fields stated in a recent media interview that the pre-deployment of personnel and fire engines to the Palisades fire was influenced by concerns over funding and the LAFD budget (i.e., money).

It is our hope, and we pray that we will all learn from the lessons of the Lachman and Palisades fire and implement sorely needed changes and improvements; however, to learn those lessons, a proper, unbiased and professional After-Action Report must be completed for both fires.

Those who ignore the past are doomed to repeat it. Our failure to learn from historical events and correct our course makes it likely that the same errors will be made again in the future. Wildland fires and Santa Ana winds will not cease to exist. That is one fact that we need to remember.

Respectfully,

LAFD Chief Officers and Captains