

LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



KRISTIN M. CROWLEY
FIRE CHIEF

January 13, 2025

TO: Kristin M. Crowley, Fire Chief

FROM: LAFD Chief Officers

SUBJECT: PALISADES FIRE AND STATE OF AFFAIRS OF THE LAFD.

It is our duty to transmit this communication to you as fire service professionals and members who care deeply for the citizens we swore an oath to protect and the members of the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD). The hallmark of the LAFD has always been the relentless pursuit of job excellence, after action reports, critical analysis, and preparing for the big one.

It is in that vein that former and current Chief Officers (Battalion Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs) have examined, evaluated and discussed the Palisades fire and the current state of affairs of the LAFD under your command.

Chief, please focus on your current duties and responsibilities which currently should be focused on mitigating and stabilizing the Palisades fire. Your outburst regarding the budget and the statement that the "City failed the LAFD" was ill-advised, poorly timed and took away from the most important issue, the Palisades fire.

When this incident is over, there will be a time for investigations, after action reviews, reflection, and of course the inevitable finger pointing and placement of blame, which you apparently have already started. No other Fire Chief in the history of the LAFD (Manning, Bamattre, Terrazas) have behaved as you have in recent days.

You have been the Fire Chief since March 25, 2022. You have been aware of the budget issues of the LAFD prior to your appointment as Fire Chief, yet now you publicly proclaim that you have been sounding the alarm about the LAFD budget to no avail? Please do not be disingenuous as we know better. You went along with the budget cuts and now that they have come back to haunt you, you appear to be in CYA mode.

How many meetings have you had with the Mayor regarding our budget crisis?
How many meetings have you had with City Council personnel regarding our budget crisis? Have you appeared before the Public Safety Committee or the Budget and Finance Committee and informed them that the LAFD is in crisis mode?

For the past two years under your command and on your watch, the following has occurred and continues to occur, keeping in mind this is only a small number of critical issues that you have ignored and or failed to resolve:

1. Lack of mechanics and support personnel at the Supply and Maintenance Division.
2. Lack of funds or ability to purchase sorely needed automobile and apparatus parts.
3. Issues with Workers Compensation and members receiving prompt and necessary medical care.
4. Issues with Fire Department personnel paychecks. Many members pay was disrupted due to issues with the new payroll system Workday. Some of the issues were out of your control; however, you and Chief Orin Saunders allowed the problem to reach critical mass. To this day this issue has not been resolved.
5. Multiple, significant lawsuits filed by females, minorities and command officers related to retaliation, harassment and hostile work environment issues.
6. Issues related to antiquated dispatch equipment including our CAD system, staffing issues at Metropolitan Dispatch Center which directly affect public safety and welfare.
7. Lack of reserve apparatus.
8. Lack of necessary medical supplies for EMS incidents.
9. Extreme call load and work issues. Our folks continue to be recalled, work multiple shifts without adequate rest and are running 15-30 calls in a shift, with multiple calls between 2200-0630 resulting in fatigued firefighters and paramedics.
10. Multiple Chief Officer transfers, including in a 6-month period, three officers placed into the Chief of Staff position, and other key command positions.
11. The promotion of Kristine Larson to Deputy Chief, despite you knowing about her lack of professionalism and lack of emotional intelligence. We are of course referring to her very public gaffe wearing the LAFD badge and uniform where she so righteously declared that a fire victim needing rescue got himself in the wrong place. Surely you could have found someone else worthy of being promoted to Deputy.

In 2024, over 125 senior, experienced Chief Officers retired (obviously not your fault!). What was concerning about this large exodus of experienced fire service professionals was that you knew this would occur years in advance to it happening.

You did nothing to put into place any mechanism to recall this experienced command cadre through a Bounce program or other temporary worker program which would have allowed you to tap many experts during the Palisades fire. Many of these command officers were veterans of numerous wildland incidents, and significant incidents who undoubtedly would have been beneficial in the management of this catastrophe.

While no one is saying that this fire could have been stopped, there is no doubt among all of us that if you had done things right and prepared the LAFD for an incident of this magnitude, fatalities would have been reduced, and property would have been saved.

Chief Crowley, lives were lost at the Palisades fire. How does this happen in the City of Los Angeles in a residential neighborhood?. It is the responsibility of the LAFD with the support and assistance of the LAPD to evacuate at risk residents. This clearly did not occur at this incident. As harsh as this sounds, the horrific truth is that you and your command staff own this terrible loss of life.

We all know that residents residing in any residential wildland urban interface are at risk during a wind driven brush fire. Yes evacuation alerts went out, however they were too little too late. They were not coordinated or organized as they should have been. What happened with the Bureau Commanders working with their respective LAPD Bureaus/Divisions on evacuation orders/plans prior to these catastrophic incidents occurring?

Where were the Community Fire Patrols, High Hazard Brush Patrols, etc.? When was the last fire station first in district quarterly drive through conducted (no longer in effect under your command) which would have identified potential brushfire issues.

All the preventive systems and mechanisms that we have put into place in the past were nonexistent at the Palisades fire. We attribute this to you and your command staffs lack of experience, arrogance, inability to lead and manage the LAFD both in emergency and non-emergency times, and the recent retirement of over 125 senior command officers.

Your job as Fire Chief was to prepare us, the LAFD for an incident of this magnitude and you have failed. As you are aware, in 2024, United Firefighters of Los Angeles City and the Chief Officers Association discussed a vote of no confidence in your ability to lead and manage the LAFD. This action was not taken for various reasons, including the hope that you would grow into the job, which sadly has not happened.

Personnel you have promoted to key command positions have little to no command experience, wildland firefighting experience and virtually none have ever held the position of Strike Team Leaders, Division Supervisors, Branch Directors, Operations Commanders and or Incident Commanders of large-scale incidents.

This directly contributed to the LAFD's diminished command at what is arguably the largest fire incident we have ever faced.

Your 2023-2026 strategic plan which was widely touted by you and former Chief Deputy Drake lists seven goals. One of the goals is deliver exceptional public safety and emergency services, the other six goals address commitments to embrace diversity, equity and inclusion, promote a safe, healthy and progressive work environment and enhance environmental sustainability (whatever that one is). You and Chief Drake have failed in the most important goal which is deliver exceptional public safety and emergency services.

During the past three years, you have been told on numerous occasions by many senior, experienced fire officers and the Chief Officers Association of the need to focus on the basic mission of the LAFD and the requisite items that support that mission, which as you remember is "Save lives and property". It was then and is now apparent that the advice fell on deaf ears.

You emotionally stated on the news that the City has failed you. It is the opinion of many LAFD Chief Officers who work for you that you, Chief Crowley have failed the citizens of Los Angeles, the members of the LAFD and your Chief Officers.

With the most destructive fire in the history of the City of Los Angeles in progress, it was in extremely poor form and lacking in judgment to start squabbling and pointing the finger of blame. You would have better served us by being present in the EOC, DOC and or the CP.

It appears you are currently in self-preservation/CYA mode while you put forth your version and false narrative of your attempt to fight city hall and minimize cuts to our budget. Again too little, too late. We have been in a budget crisis during your entire tenure as Fire Chief, yet you have continued to operate for the past 3 years without significantly bringing this matter to the attention of the Mayor, the City Council and the public.

Please remember any statement you make or position you take will be fact checked and there are numerous LAFD Chief Officers who will refute anything that you say that is less than 100 percent truthful.

The Fire Commission meetings during your tenure are the running joke of your staff and the department. Items deemed important by you and the commission such as your schedule, parades, mural painting procedures, and other sundry items not even remotely related to wildfire preparation and or emergency operations are discussed with gusto; yet meeting after meeting, nothing of substance is discussed or accomplished. Luckily fire commission meetings are recorded and available on You Tube for everyone to watch this truly stunning display of incompetence and mismanagement. It is our hope that the entire Fire Commission board will be replaced with competent personnel willing to engage with the Mayor, City Council and aggressively advocate for the LAFD.

Chief Crowley, you have lost the confidence of the Mayor and more importantly you have lost the confidence of many Chief Officers of the LAFD. When this incident is stabilized, the LAFD must be rebuilt. This includes from the top down. You may feel that you and your current command staff are up to that incredible responsibility and challenge; however you must know that a large number of Chief Officers do not believe you are up to the task and feel that your retirement from the position of Fire Chief would be the best for the citizens of Los Angeles, the members of the LAFD, yourself and your family.

Retired and Active LAFD Chief Officers.