



# ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

550 N. FLOWER STREET  
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SHERIFF-CORONER  
SANDRA HUTCHENS

To the community we serve:

Trust between the public and law enforcement is continually evolving. The Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCS D) believes it is important to bring to the attention of the public an unfounded mischaracterization by the Orange County Register that attempts to erode that trust, and was not corrected despite numerous requests.

On Monday June 25, 2018, the Register published an online article titled, "Report: Nearly half the deaths in O.C. jails could have been avoided" following the publication of an Orange County Grand Jury report. OCS D responded to the Grand Jury report with a statement refuting many of the findings. OCS D's statement regarding the Grand Jury's report can be found here.

The Register article, authored by Tony Saavedra, included the following statement; "Other groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union and news investigations have questioned health care in the jails, violent holds used by some jailers, and *rampant racism and homophobia.*" (emphasis added)

When OCS D questioned the Register regarding the basis for the accusation of racism and homophobia, the Register could not produce any report, article, or citation making any claim even moderately close to those assertions. Instead, the Register cited two statements in the American Civil Liberties Union 2017 report on Orange County jails from former inmates. The inmates stated that because they were gay, they were placed in protective custody rather than the general population. Classification decisions in custody designed to protect inmates does not qualify as homophobia.

The Register provided no basis for the assertion of racism, pulled the statement from the online version of the story, and issued the following correction, "*An earlier version of this story incorrectly suggested a 2017 ACLU report criticized the Orange County Sheriff's Dept. of racism.*"

The Sheriff's Department repeatedly requested the Register pull the claim of homophobia from the article and issue an additional correction. The Register declined to do so, and instead ran the article in the print edition on June 26, 2018, with the baseless claim of homophobia included.

Not only is the claim of homophobia unsubstantiated, OCS D actively engages with the LGBTQ community. OCS D is a founding member of the LGBTQ Orange County Policing Partnership and works to improve police community relations with the LGBTQ community. Additionally, OCS D meets regularly with our Correctional Diversity Council that includes representation from the LGBTQ community. Negligent reporting has the potential to harm relationships that we have worked hard to build.

OCS D recognizes and respects the vital role of the press in today's society. The press has a responsibility to hold government accountable and to call out wrongdoings when they occur. The press also has a fundamental responsibility to fairly and accurately report the truth. Baseless accusations of "rampant racism and homophobia" against the department are reckless and irresponsible. The Register should be



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working to accurately report the news, not actively attempting to deteriorate the relationship between the county's chief law enforcement agency and the community we serve.

OCSD is committed to providing exceptional law enforcement services without bias or prejudice, and works tirelessly to maintain a mutually beneficial and positive rapport with all citizens of Orange County. Thank you for letting us keep you safe.