

## The New York Times

# *Ex-Los Angeles Sheriff Lee Baca Is Sentenced to 3 Years in Prison*

By Matt Stevens

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Lee Baca, the former Los Angeles County sheriff, was sentenced to three years in prison on Friday for orchestrating a multifaceted scheme to derail a federal investigation into his troubled jails.

The sentence, handed down by Judge Percy Anderson of the United States District Court, concluded a yearslong ordeal that eventually led prosecutors to convict several of Mr. Baca's subordinates before targeting the former sheriff himself.

Prosecutors had previously failed to secure a conviction against Mr. Baca when a jury deadlocked in December. At that time, 11 jurors sought to acquit the former sheriff, while one believed him to be guilty.

Prosecutors chose to retry the case, and in March, another jury took less than two days to convict Mr. Baca, 74, on charges of obstructing justice and lying to federal investigators.

Friday's sentence also punctuated the rapid fall of the former sheriff, who served for 15 years and was once praised as a progressive leader of the country's largest sheriff's department.

Mr. Baca, who resigned as sheriff in 2014 amid the growing scandal, was ordered by Judge Anderson to begin serving his sentence by July 25 and to pay a \$7,500 fine. The judge said Mr. Baca "knew what he was doing was wrong" and "had no problem using his office to further his own agenda," according a statement provided by the Justice Department.

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“Blind obedience to a corrupt culture has serious consequences,” Judge Anderson continued.

In a statement emailed to The New York Times, Mr. Baca’s lawyer, Nathan J. Hochman, said the former sheriff’s conviction and sentence would both be appealed. He noted the different outcome of Mr. Baca’s first trial and blamed the court for improperly excluding what he called “key defense evidence” the second time around.

(Last year, federal prosecutors reached a plea deal with Mr. Baca, which would have put him in prison for no longer than six months. But Judge Anderson ruled that the sentence was too lenient.)

“When the appellate court hears all the evidence in the case, something which the second jury did not, we are confident that Mr. Baca’s conviction will be reversed and we will be back for a third trial,” Mr. Hochman said in his statement.

“For over 48 years, Sheriff Lee Baca served the people of Los Angeles County with all his heart, his soul and his energy 24 hours a day, 365 days a year,” he added, lauding his client’s work as a sheriff who educated inmates and engaged with Los Angeles’s diverse array of ethnic and religious communities.

Prosecutors, however, painted a starkly different picture by arguing that Mr. Baca oversaw a scheme that began in 2011 to obstruct a federal investigation into corruption and civil rights abuses at county jail facilities. It was then that sheriff’s department officials discovered a cellphone in the cell of an inmate they learned was acting as an informant for the F.B.I.

Mr. Baca subsequently ordered a criminal investigation into the federal agents who were conducting the investigation, and directed his subordinates to hide the informant from investigators, prosecutors said.

Those subordinates did as they were told: hiding the informant, engaging in witness tampering and threatening to arrest the lead F.B.I. agent on the case, the Justice Department said.

Prosecutors said Mr. Baca put his undersheriff, Paul Tanaka, in charge of the scheme.

Mr. Tanaka, who also resigned from the department before mounting an unsuccessful campaign to replace Mr. Baca as sheriff, was convicted of obstruction of justice and conspiracy last year and sentenced to five years in prison.

Mr. Baca has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and at Friday's sentencing, Judge Anderson said Mr. Baca would have received a sentence equal to Mr. Tanaka had it not been for the former sheriff's medical condition and his history of public service.

The Justice Department said Mr. Baca was the 10th member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to be convicted in the obstruction scheme. Eleven other former deputies have also been convicted of federal charges, mostly related to beating inmates and subsequent cover-ups to hide the abuse, the Justice Department said.