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City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, LAPD Target Mara Salvatrucha For Gang Injunction

Mayor Jim Hahn, LAPD Chief William Bratton and Councilmembers Ed Reyes and Eric Garcetti Say Legal Tool Will Help Police Suppress Crime and Empower Residents

LOS ANGELES – City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, joined by Councilmember Ed P. Reyes and LAPD Chief William Bratton, announced details of a lawsuit seeking an injunction against the Mara Salvatrucha gang, which has been linked to 18 murders in the last two years.

“Residents of the Rampart and East Hollywood communities have been subjected to fear, threats and senseless violent criminal activity in their neighborhoods for too long,” Delgadillo said at a news conference at Lafayette Park. “The killing must stop. The terror must end. My office will continue to do everything in its power to assist our brave police force and protect our neighborhoods and families – and I make no apologies for it.”

Upon approval by a judge, the injunction would restrict Mara Salvatrucha gang members from participating in gang-related activities inside “safety zones” in two separate areas west of downtown Los Angeles. The “safety zones,” which together encompass the largest geographic area of any of the 20 gang injunctions previously filed by the Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office, are patrolled by officers in LAPD’s Rampart, Hollywood, Northeast and Wilshire divisions.

The restrictions would prohibit gang members from publicly associating with other members, loitering, intimidating community members, and collecting extortion money, “rent,” or “taxes” from residents and business owners to avoid harassment.

“Gang injunctions are an important tool for ensuring that Los Angeles neighborhoods are free from crime, fear and intimidation,” said Mayor Jim Hahn. “We must continue to work together to keep Lafayette Park safe for the people who live and work here everyday. I applaud City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo for his commitment to making the communities of our city safer.”

“For years, our community has been tormented by members of this gang. The gang members have been ruthless in their methods and heartless in their actions,” said Councilmember Reyes, who represents the neighborhoods in covered by the “safety zones.” “I applaud City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo and Chief Bratton for taking on this issue and creating this new crime fighting tool. We can not allow our streets to be taken over by this type of criminal element.”

“As a city, we’re making great strides in crime fighting but we have to work smarter at the same time as we work harder,” said Councilmember Eric Garcetti, who represents the Hollywood neighborhoods where the injunction will take effect. “Putting the Mara Salvatrucha gang injunction in the police and prosecutor toolkit will make the residents of my district safer.”

“In light of the city’s limited resources and the goals we have set for crime reduction this year, the department has to be more assertive and focused,” Bratton said. “Two weeks ago, we started the community safety task force program in our Central and South Bureaus. Today’s gang injunction is another tool the department can use to provide relief from gang violence and assist us in reaching our crime reduction goals.”

Delgadillo said the injunction – combined with the current use of undercover stings, probation sweeps, foot patrols and special operations – should significantly aid police efforts to suppress gang activity in the Rampart area.

“The strength of this gang injunction will give us the tools to empower the residents of this community to take back the streets from these criminals,” Delgadillo said.

The injunction, filed March 9 in Los Angeles Superior Court, prohibits Mara Salvatrucha gang members from the following activities within the Safety Zone:

- Associating with other Mara Salvatrucha members in public;
- Intimidating any person in any way for any reason;
- Trespassing on private property;
- Engaging in graffiti activity or possessing graffiti tools;
- Possessing any drugs or drug related paraphernalia;
- Possessing any alcoholic beverage in public;
- Carrying any weapons or objects commonly used as weapons;
- Extorting money, including collecting “rent” or “taxes.”

The Mara Salvatrucha criminal street gang originated in the Rampart area in the 1980s by immigrants fleeing the civil war in El Salvador. Many of the original members have ties to gangs in El Salvador and use sophisticated and brutal gorilla warfare tactics when dealing with the police.

Today, Mara Salvatrucha is the second largest gang in Los Angeles with up to 600 members in Los Angeles and 1,400 members in Los Angeles County. There are about 20,000 Mara Salvatrucha members living in cities nationwide, including Washington, D.C., the suburbs of Virginia, Seattle, Alaska, New York and Texas.

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The Mara Salvatrucha gang has a reputation for brutal violence and intimidation, which has allowed them to control the two neighborhoods included in the safety zones. Mara Salvatrucha accumulates most of their income from the sale of narcotics and members are linked to 18 homicides in 2003-04, including two murders and four shootings in a single parking lot on Leeward Street, according to Deputy City Attorney Lizabeth Shiner of Delgadillo's Gang Unit.

Mara Salvatrucha members have committed robberies, felony assaults, graffiti and auto thefts within the safety zone to perpetuate their hold on their community. The gang also has been known to collect "rent" or "taxes" from local business owners, including street vendors as a form of extortion to avoid vandalism or intimidation of customers. Extortion also extends to those engaged in illegal activities in the communities, including drug dealing and prostitution.

The Mara Salvatrucha gang injunction is the city's 21st filed since 1993. In March, Delgadillo's Gang Unit secured permanent injunctions against the Eastside and Westside Wilmas gangs in Wilmington, as well as a permanent injunction against the 18th Street Gang in Hollywood.

Los Angeles is home to 800 known gangs and more than 56,000 gang members, according to the LAPD.

In 1997, the California Supreme Court upheld the use of public nuisance laws to obtain injunctions prohibiting known gang members from nuisance and criminal behavior in narrowly defined areas. The Court upheld the legality of the orders, noting that unlawful and violent behavior does not come under the protection of the Constitution.

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