

Riverside County, California sheriff's department allegedly misused \$4.6 million of pandemic aid

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On Friday, July 30, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other local groups filed a complaint with the U.S. Treasury Department's Inspector General alleging that Riverside County, California misused over \$4.6 million in CARES Act funding, spending it on the sheriff's department for items unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ACLU complaint states that \$1.3 million was used to upgrade key cards and surveillance cameras, \$669,000 was spent on bulletproof windows and security improvements, and \$2.7 million on office furniture.

This blatant misuse of funds was unanimously approved by all five members of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors and has been callously defended by Undersheriff Dennis Vrooman and Sheriff Chad Bianco.

Commenting on the \$2.7 million used for new office furniture, Vrooman stated that, "If we replace them [office furniture], it's less likely that we have the spread of disease and things like that in those facilities for both inmates and staff."

Upon learning of the complaint filed by the ACLU, Bianco sent an emailed statement declaring, "three completely anti-law enforcement (and particularly) anti-Sheriff's Department ...organizations have made more frivolous complaints and are counting on anti-law enforcement media to fuel their demands for social justice."

It bears recalling that Bianco made national headlines last year when he publicly refused to enforce lockdown measures during the 2020 holiday season, just as rising cases and hospitalizations swept the Riverside County area.

This garnered him the approval of far-right, anti-lockdown groups and conservative news organizations such as Fox News and One America News Network.

Bianco has also publicly stated that he will refuse to take the vaccine, despite two of his employees having died from COVID-19 during the onset of the pandemic.

In response to the multi-racial, anti-police protests that erupted after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Bianco directed his deputies to use tear gas, pepper balls and rubber bullets on protesters immediately after a city-wide curfew went into effect.

As county officials use pandemic aid to splurge on themselves, Riverside County residents are experiencing an upsurge in infections as students return to school for in-person instruction amid the spread of the more infectious Delta variant.

According to county data, Riverside County has seen a six-fold increase in infections, reporting 6,840 positive cases in July 2021 compared to 1,005 in June 2021.

The \$4.6 million snared by the Sheriff's Department is in glaring contrast to the underfunded and overcrowded hospitals in the Riverside County area.

Just last year, nurses in SEIU local 121 at the Riverside Community Hospital went on strike in order to fight back against the lack of proper safety equipment and the low staff-to-patient ratios that were endangering patients and the community.

As always, the ruling class and their political lackeys claim that there is simply not enough money to meet the pressing material needs of workers, but this recent scandal in Riverside County has exposed this bold-faced lie.

Adrienna Wong, ACLU Southern California senior

staff attorney, who helped file the initial complaint against Riverside County, is asking the federal government to recover the \$4.6 million in CARES Act money to be used for actual COVID-19-related expenses.

But it bears noting that Wong is pleading with the very same federal government that has used trillions of dollars in order to bail out the financial aristocracy during the pandemic, accepted the murderous policies of “herd immunity”—which has led to 600,000 plus deaths—and has actively floated an already disproven “Wuhan lab” leak conspiracy, in order to deflect blame for the government’s criminal mishandling of the pandemic onto China.

Biden announced in June that states and localities could funnel any amount from \$350 billion allocated in COVID-19 relief through the American Rescue Plan, enacted in March, to fund police departments, including the hiring of more officers.

Only the working class armed with a scientific program and socialist perspective can eliminate COVID-19 and bring the pandemic to an end.

We urge workers in health care, education and elsewhere to form your own rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the two pro-capitalist political parties, in order to fight for and implement socialist policies that will direct funds to where they are needed the most, which is away from police departments that enforce social inequality and class rule and into the hands of teachers, nurses and everyday workers that will use such funds to end the pandemic once and for all.

For assistance in creating a rank-and-file committee in your workplace, contact the WSWs today!



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact