

## INTRADEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

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POLICE COMMISSION

February 3, 2021

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**TO:** The Honorable Board of Police Commissioners**FROM:** Chief of Police

*Jane Fank*  
REVIEWED *for* 2/17/21  
RICHARD M. TEFANK  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
DATE

**SUBJECT:** ROBERT W. STEWART**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

1. That the Board of Police Commissioners (Board) REVIEW and APPROVE this report.
2. That the Board TRANSMIT the report to the City Council.

**DISCUSSION**

At the direction of the Board of Police Commissioners, and with support of the Department's affiliated employee groups, the Los Angeles Police Department has embarked on an extensive reevaluation of its history and how that history is conveyed to its sworn personnel. This process has revealed aspects of our past that we must collectively acknowledge so that we may continue to effectively serve as guardians to all Angelenos. One story that I have been committed to bringing to light since my appointment to Chief of Police two years ago is that of Policeman Robert William Stewart.

Robert William Stewart was born into slavery in Kentucky on March 1, 1850. In 1886, he moved to Los Angeles with his family; and on March 30, 1889, Stewart and Joseph Henry Green were selected to become the first African American officers within the ranks of the Los Angeles Police Department. Stewart was assigned to work patrol within what is now part of Central Area.

Because he was the first African American patrolman, Stewart's actions drew a great deal of attention. Numerous newspaper articles reported on his exemplary police work, detailing his arrests and instances of rendering medical aid to community members.

On the evening of May 10, 1900, Stewart was arrested by LAPD detectives for allegedly assaulting a 15 year-old girl that he encountered while conducting patrol. Stewart admitted to having spoken to his accuser, but denied ever having any physical contact with her. The case was criminally filed, and Stewart was held for trial.

Within the span of two weeks, the Board of Police Commissioners twice considered whether to allow Stewart to continue his employment with the Department. During the first meeting, four of the five Commissioners remained steadfast in their support of Stewart's right to present a defense in his criminal trial before the body made any decisions about his employment. By their second meeting, however, sentiment had shifted. In a 3-2 vote, the Board of Police Commissioners elected to terminate Stewart.

Robert William Stewart went on to stand two trials for the assault allegations. The first ended in a deadlocked jury. In the second trial, the jury took less than 40 minutes to find him not guilty.

Despite the favorable resolution of the case against him, Stewart was not rehired by the Department. The accusations against him had cost him his job and reputation. Stewart worked as a laborer and janitor until the time of his death, at the age of 81, on July 27, 1931.

In light of these circumstances, I am asking that the Commissioners join the Department in restoring Stewart's legacy over the course of this Black History Month. In the coming days, I will be coordinating with City Council members and requesting that Council be recessed in Policeman Stewart's honor. The Department will also finalize plans to, as COVID protocols permit, host a ceremony to formally rename the Central Area roll call room the *Robert William Stewart Roll Call Room*. My request of the Board of Police Commissioners is that you support the ceremonial reinstatement and retirement of Policeman Stewart ahead of the Department and Council's actions, so that his restored standing within the Department's history can be properly recorded.

I recognize that none of these actions can restore in death what was denied Policeman Stewart in life. But I firmly believe that correcting this wrong can serve as one of many steps on the path to true reconciliation and progress.

Should you have any questions or wish to meet to discuss this matter further, Mr. Fred Booker is acting as my liaison for this project and can be reached via email at [R6095@lapd.online](mailto:R6095@lapd.online).

Respectfully,



MICHEL R. MOORE  
Chief of Police

BOARD OF  
POLICE COMMISSIONERS  
Approved *February 23, 2021*  
Secretary *Maria Silva*