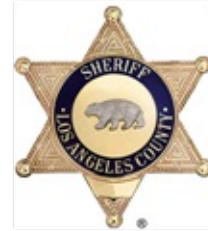


25-11 - Face Covering/ Identification of Law Enforcement Personnel

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

NEWSLETTER

Field Operations Support Services



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FACE COVERING/ IDENTIFICATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

PURPOSE

This informational newsletter is designed to inform Department members about California Senate Bill 627, codified in California Penal Code section 185.5, that bans law enforcement officers from wearing facial coverings that conceal or obscure their facial identity (including ski masks, gaiters, and similar opaque face coverings) in the performance of their duties.

This law goes into effect on January 1, 2026.

Department personnel must ensure compliance with the law which prohibits wearing facial coverings, unless covered by the statutory exceptions.

BACKGROUND

California Penal Code section 185.5, enacted by California Senate Bill 627, prohibits federal and local law enforcement officers from wearing facial coverings as defined (including, but not limited to, ski masks, balaclavas and neck gaiters) during law enforcement operations. This law provides for exceptions to the facial covering prohibition, including for undercover law enforcement operations, officers performing Special Weapons and Tactics responsibilities, and medical needs.

Please note that the provisions as applied to federal law enforcement officials is under review by judicial authorities. The Department will wait for judicial guidance before proceeding with that provision of the law.

In addition, California Government Code section 7289 was added, which requires that by July 1, 2026, law enforcement agencies operating in California maintain and publicly post a written policy regarding the use of facial coverings, with specified requirements, including a list of narrowly tailored exemptions. The Department is in the process of crafting that policy.

To support the enactment of these laws, the legislature made several findings including that "the routine use of facial coverings by law enforcement officers has significant implications for public perception, officer-community interactions, and accountability."

PROVISIONS OF SB 627:

- **Defines Face Coverings:** Defines "facial covering" for purposes of newly added Penal Code section 185.5 as any opaque mask, garment, helmet, headgear, or other item that conceals or obscures the facial identity of an individual, including, but not limited to, a baclava, tactical mask, gator, ski mask, and any similar type of facial covering or face-shielding item.

The law specifies that "facial covering" does **not** include:

- a translucent face shield or clear mask that does not conceal the wearer's facial identity and is used in compliance with the agency's policy and procedures;
 - a N95 medical mask or surgical mask to protect against transmission of disease or infection;
 - air-purifying respirators, or self-contained breathing apparatuses necessary to protect against exposure to toxin, gas, smoke, inclement weather or any other hazardous or harmful environmental conditions,
 - a mask or device necessary for underwater use;
 - a motorcycle helmet when worn by an officer using a motorcycle or other vehicle that requires a helmet for safe operations; or
 - eyewear necessary to protect from the use of retinal weapons.
- **Bans Face Coverings:** Prohibits the wearing of masks (such as neck gaiters, ski masks) while in the performance of law enforcement operations.
 - **Specifies Exceptions:** Allows face coverings for Special Enforcement Bureau (Special Weapons and Tactics - SWAT) in the performance of SWAT responsibilities, active undercover operations or assignments, tactical operations where protective gear is required for physical safety, the protection of identity during prosecution, and as may be required by law for occupational health and safety and/or a reasonable accommodation.
 - **Agency Policies:** Mandates that agencies create policies to comply with the law by July 1, 2026. Allows a member of the public, an oversight body, or a local governing authority to submit a written challenge to the legality of these policies. Provides that agencies have 90 days to correct any deficiencies and permits complaining parties to seek judicial review of challenged policies.
 - **Criminal Penalties:** Imposes criminal penalties for willful and knowing violations of the prohibition and provides that the specified criminal penalties will **not** apply to any law enforcement officer **if they were acting in their capacity as an employee of the agency and the agency maintains and publicly posts a written policy pursuant to Government Code section 7289.**
 - **Civil Penalties:** Imposes civil penalties for officers who commit tortious conduct while violating the facial covering prohibition including assault, battery, false imprisonment, false arrest, abuse of process or malicious prosecution.

In addition to the state law, Los Angeles County is advancing its own ordinance to prohibit law enforcement from masking. Effective January 8, 2026, the County ordinance prohibits the wearing of masks or disguises while interacting with the public when working in unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.

If you require further information, contact Field Operations Support Services at (323) 890-5411 or fossunit@lasd.org.

REFERENCES

[Senate Bill 627 \(SB 627\)](#)

[Senate Bill 805 \(SB 805\)](#)

[3-03/340.00 - Name Tags](#)

[3-03/070.95 - Deputy Sheriff Identification](#)

[3-03/340.01 - Name Tag Exceptions](#)
