



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Glendale Police Officer Arrested on Federal Charges of Lying to Federal Agents Investigating His Ties to Organized Crime**

*LOS ANGELES* – Agents and officers associated with an FBI-led task force late this afternoon arrested a Glendale Police officer on federal charges of making false statements during interviews with investigators who were probing his connections to the Mexican Mafia and Armenian organized crime.

Detective John Saro Balian, 45, of Seal Beach, was taken into custody without incident at his residence.

Balian, who is charged in a criminal complaint with making false statements to investigators during an interview last year, is expected to make his initial appearance Wednesday afternoon in United States District Court in Los Angeles.

According to the complaint, which was filed Monday and unsealed after his arrest, Balian was interviewed by several law enforcement agencies over a six-month period in 2017 and repeatedly made false statements and misrepresentations about his links to criminal figures.

For example, Balian lied during an April 2017 interview with an FBI agent and Los Angeles Police Detectives “in an effort to hide his associations and criminal collaborations with gang members, the Mexican Mafia and Armenian organized crime,” according to an affidavit signed by a special agent with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

The complaint alleges that Balian lied to mislead investigators about his relationship with a gang member – Jose Loza, a Mexican Mafia member and the “shotcaller” of the Canta Ranas street gang, who is currently facing federal racketeering charges – even though at the time “Balian was communicating with Loza via a burner cell phone to discuss jointly undertaken criminal activities.”

During a second interview in June 2017 with the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, Balian allegedly lied about accepting money to locate individuals who may have been associated with a burglary at the offices of a convicted felon who later became an informant. According to the affidavit, not only did the informant report paying Balian to locate two men who may

have stolen property from the informant's office, Balian sought to obtain information about one of the men from a deputy United States marshal, and text messages between the informant and Balian documented the arrangement.

The complaint also accuses Balian of lying during an August 2017 interview with authorities who asked about his receipt of money from the informant and Balian's relationships with several Hispanic gang members. Balian not only knew Hispanic gang members, including Loza, he also "texted them, provided them pre-paid cellular phones, and met with them in person," the affidavit states.

During a fourth interview in October 2017 with an HSI agent and an FBI task force officer, Balian allegedly lied, among other things, about previously having met Loza, the complaint alleges. This conduct forms the basis for the false statements charge alleged in the complaint.

"Cases involving corrupt public officials – and particularly those involving crimes allegedly committed by police officers – are among the most difficult and troubling matters we see," said United States Attorney Nicola T. Hanna. "We rely on law enforcement officers to uphold their oaths to faithfully serve their communities. If the allegations in this case are proven, this police officer provided meaningful support to criminal enterprises, and his attempts to cover up his associations served to obstruct justice."

"The defendant swore to uphold an oath to enforce the law, but instead chose to break the law," said Paul Delacourt, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office. "Mr. Balian moved in criminal circles and operated as though he was above the law by repeatedly lying to hide his criminal activity and that of others. His alleged actions impeded legitimate investigations into organized violent crime and consequently presented a threat to public safety."

"Enforcing the laws of our nation and our communities is a calling like no other. All law enforcement professionals are held to a higher standard," said Joseph Macias, Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations in Los Angeles. "HSI stands with all of our partners in our commitment to ensuring that corrupt law enforcement officers who break our laws, violate public trust and compromise safety are prosecuted to the fullest extent. The public deserves no less."

In addition to the false statements Balian allegedly made over the course of several months last year, the affidavit contains allegations that the police officer worked with a local street gang member and Mexican Mafia associate after Loza was taken into federal custody. This gangster provided information to authorities indicating that Balian disclosed information about another federal racketeering case that allowed the lead defendant to avoid arrest during the takedown and remain a fugitive for a month, according to the affidavit. Balian regularly communicated with the gangster-turned-informant through pre-paid "burner" cell phones, with Balian relaying law enforcement information about planned searches at marijuana grows and instructing the gangster to

“hit them” before law enforcement executed the search warrants, the affidavit states. The gangster also reported that Balian was involved in disposing of a firearm used in a shooting, extortion plots, and the gangster said he acted as the bagman on at least two extortions.

*A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.*

If Balian were to be convicted of the charge of making false statements to federal investigators, he would face a statutory maximum sentence of five years in federal prison.

The case against Balian is the result of an ongoing investigation by the Eurasian Organized Crime Task Force, which is made up of special agents with the FBI, HSI, IRS Criminal Investigation and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Inspector General, as well as officers with the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, the Glendale Police Department, the Burbank Police Department and the California Department of Health Care Services.

This matter is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jeff Mitchell of the Violent and Organized Crime Section.