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L.A. County jail probe includes claim that deputies beat visitor

Gabriel Carrillo, visiting his brother at Men's Central Jail, suffered bruises and cuts in an altercation with sheriff's deputies. Carrillo says he was attacked; deputies say he was resisting.



Gabriel Carrillo and his girlfriend, Griselda Torres, show a photo she took of Carrillo a few days after he was severely beaten in the Men's Central Jail in Los Angeles. He says the altercation was unprovoked. Carrillo's case is one of several being investigated by the FBI in a probe of alleged misconduct by Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies. (Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times)



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L.A. County supervisors impose jail oversight



By Robert Faturechi and Jack Leonard, Los Angeles Times

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The FBI probe into the Los Angeles County jails has expanded to include allegations of a man who says he was beaten and pepper sprayed by deputies while handcuffed during a visit to see his incarcerated brother.

The accusations of Gabriel Carrillo, who suffered serious bruises and cuts during the altercation on Feb. 26, have also sparked a criminal investigation by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Carrillo contends he was the victim of an unprovoked attack,

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but deputies said they used force only after he assaulted them. The violence, they said, occurred after they detained him for possessing a cellphone at the jail.

Based on the deputies' statements, the district attorney's office charged Carrillo with battery, resisting the deputies, trying to escape arrest and bringing a cellphone into the jail. But prosecutors last week abruptly dropped the case, saying they were awaiting more Sheriff's Department reports. They would not elaborate and said they might refile the charges later.

Carrillo's case is one of several allegations of deputy brutality and other misconduct that federal authorities are investigating. Earlier this year, an undercover FBI sting ensnared a deputy who allegedly sneaked a cellphone to an inmate who was a federal informant.

Carrillo's attorney, Ronald Kaye, spent the last few months building a case that his client was a victim, not an assailant. He cites as key evidence photos that show Carrillo had bruising to both of his wrists, which, he says, shows that his client was handcuffed throughout the struggle. The deputies said only one of Carrillo's hands was cuffed.

Kaye said federal agents requested and have received Sheriff's Department reports he was given by the district attorney's office. They also asked to interview his client but have yet to do so, Kaye said.

FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller declined to comment on the Carrillo case but said the "investigation into alleged misconduct in the Los Angeles County jail system remains

active and ongoing."

Sheriff's Capt. Mike Parker declined to provide specific details about the department's investigation but said it would be "thorough and comprehensive."

The deputies gave the following account of Carrillo's arrest in their reports and court testimony:

Two deputies working in the visiting area of Men's Central Jail discovered that a visitor, Griselda Torres, had brought a cellphone into the facility.

Torres admitted to having a phone and told deputies that her boyfriend, Carrillo, also had one. Carrillo, using a profanity, told Deputy Pantamitr Zunggeemoge that he did have a phone. "What are you going to do, arrest me?"

Carrillo was handcuffed and escorted to a nearby break room, where deputies book some visitors who are under arrest. Zunggeemoge searched Carrillo and found a cellphone in his pants pocket. As the deputy removed a handcuff from Carrillo's right hand so he could be fingerprinted, Carrillo used his left arm to elbow the deputy.

Carrillo tried to bolt from the room and encountered another deputy, whom Carrillo punched in the chest. The deputies took Carrillo to the floor, which he struck face first. Carrillo punched and kicked at the deputies as they struggled to control him.

Carrillo was pepper-sprayed in the face. He spat a mixture of spray, saliva and blood at one of the deputies. The deputies punched him several times before ending the struggle by handcuffing him. Three deputies were taken to a hospital for treatment, including hepatitis vaccinations. Carrillo's allegations of abuse were first reported in May by LA Weekly.

In court, Carrillo's attorney accused Zunggeemoge of lying.

"They used this pretext of a cellular telephone to take this man who perhaps had some gang tattoos but no adult criminal record to speak of, brought him into this break room and then beat him to a pulp," Kaye told the court.

A judge declared the initial arrest of Carrillo unlawful, finding that he might have violated Sheriff's Department rules, but not the law, by possessing a cellphone in the jail. The judge dismissed the

cellphone count but said the other charges could proceed to trial.

Michael Gennaco, who leads the department's watchdog agency, said the use of force is being criminally investigated by the department following the recent uproar over jail conditions. He said that after this incident and another scuffle in the jailhouse visiting area, it is now under video surveillance.

Carrillo's attorney presented prosecutors with interview narratives that challenged the deputies' accounts.

Carrillo's girlfriend told deputies after the incident that her boyfriend had been angry and aggressive over his brother's recent arrest for fighting with sheriff's deputies. She says now that she was coerced.

Another visitor at the jail that day described hearing rumbling and shouts from the break room where the deputies took Carrillo. She said other deputies opened the door to the room to enter several times, "and each time the door opened, the noise stopped in the room," according to the memo Kaye wrote to prosecutors. Kaye said the seemingly arbitrary breaks in the commotion show the deputies were in control but chose to continue to use force.

The deputies involved in the Carrillo incident could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

robert.faturechi@latimes.com

jack.leonard@latimes.com

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