

Moab hires new chief of police after months-long search

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<http://kutv.biz/news/local/new-moab-police-chief-jared-garcia-uhp-petito-laundrie-incident>

Moab, UTAH (KUTV) — A Utah Highway Patrol captain has been tapped as Moab's new chief of police after a months-long search.

Jared Garcia will take over as leader of the department May 9, the city announced Monday. Garcia has been leading the UHP Central Bureau which includes oversight of Salt Lake County troopers, DUI enforcement, and special operations.

"My family and I are very excited to join the community and make Moab our new home," Garcia said in a statement. "I am looking forward to working side by side with our officers as we seek opportunities to positively engage the community and provide exceptional public safety services to all people in Moab." Carly Castle, Moab's acting city manager, called Garcia a "seasoned law enforcement leader" whose "commitment to improving officer morale and training, and to building strong relationships within the community are exactly what we need as we look to the future."

Department difficulties

Moab is looking to the future as its past has come under nationwide scrutiny.

The police department's handling of traffic stop after reports of a fight between Gabby Petito and her fiancé, Brian Laundrie last year has been widely criticized. An investigation found Moab Officers Eric Pratt and Daniel Robbins made several mistakes during the August 2021 incident near Arches National Park, including not making an arrest.

Petito went missing and was later found dead in Wyoming, the result of homicide. Laundrie's body was discovered in a Florida nature preserve. His death was a result of suicide, his family said.

The department's chief at the time, Bret Edge, **went on family and medical leave** right as questions surfaced about Moab's handling of the incident. **Edge returned to work in January**, but only briefly as the city acknowledged "concerns about the police department" and announced plans to find a new chief.

Braydon Palmer led the department for several months during Edge's absence beginning in late September. At that time, Moab Police released a second body camera video showing the Petito-Laundrie incident – two weeks after the original body camera footage was released. Palmer chalked up the delay in releasing the additional footage to the large number of requests for it.

But **a KUTV 2News report** cast doubt on that explanation based on emails Palmer exchanged with the former Grand County attorney.

At the same time, KUTV 2News reported, the Moab Police officer manager, Kelli Day, went on leave while being investigated for illegally redacting police body camera footage in a separate incident in February 2021, in order to hide offensive comments made by officers. Day is no longer employed with the department, the city confirmed.

In an interview several days after the KUTV 2News report, Palmer called the situation "a learning experience for us" and promised the Moab Police Department would do better handling public records requests in the future.

Palmer is no longer employed with the city, Moab Mayor Joette Langianese told KUTV 2News last week.

New leadership

Garcia first joined the Utah Department of Public Safety as a Highway Patrol trooper in 2002, according to Moab's news release.

Prior to his work at the UHP Central Bureau, Garcia worked at the State Bureau of Investigation, the DPS Victim Services program, the Youth Narcotics Task Force, and other areas.

Garcia was also involved in **Operation Rio Grande**, the multi-agency effort that aimed to crack down on crime in that Salt Lake City neighborhood but **which was also criticized** by the ACLU of Utah and homeless advocates.

In 2017, Garcia was honored with the International Association of Chiefs of Police **"40 Under 40" award**.