

Hon. Todd Gloria

Mayor

City of San Diego

202 C Street, 11th Floor

San Diego, CA 92101

 ***RE: Parks & Libraries, Zero-Tolerance Zones for Crime***

Dear Mayor Gloria,

We are writing to you as community leaders, volunteers, and advocates for city parks and libraries out of concern for the state of public safety in these cherished civic resources. We want to commend you, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), and your partners at the County of San Diego for your work to curb crime in the face of unprecedented violence, drug use and sales, and other nuisance behavior that impacts the ability of San Diegans, specifically seniors, families, and youth, to safely learn and recreate. Unfortunately, despite restored SDPD funding, $388,000 in increased Park security, and $350,000 in enhanced security services at citywide libraries, we continue to experience unsafe recreational amenities as highlighted by the recent streak of shootings at city parks, and incidents reported at Central and branch libraries. Further, the unsafe state of working conditions does little to reverse attrition rates and fill vacant city positions that are integral to park and library operations.

In recent months, COVID-19 has reduced jail capacity and created a case backlog resulting in the release of dangerous individuals and a lack of prosecution. While emergency zero-bail policies have ended, we continue to experience a lack of overall enforcement and further emboldened criminality. We believe this is in part due to “progressive enforcement” policies that replace penalization with direction that serial offenders be contacted multiple times before enforcement is conducted; though, the tracking mechanism is unclear. Unless we take steps to curb the increase in violent crime and illicit activity, we will continue to put our youth, seniors, park and library users, and city personnel in harm’s way. We urge you to take the following steps to help safeguard our communities and protect the public’s ability to safely learn and recreate:

1. **Declare parks & libraries Zero-Tolerance Zones for Crime**: Neighborhood Policing Division’s policy, entitled “Progressive Enforcement,” is intended to first offer services to individuals struggling with addiction or openly using drugs. While this effort is valiant, offers of help are frequently ignored and individuals are left to continue their cycle of abuse. Progressive enforcement also requires several contacts before enforcement action is taken and we fear that contacts are not being accurately tracked between officers and departments. We also fear that allowing addiction to go untreated can lead to psychosis or death, which can be expedited with the introduction of P2P methamphetamine and fentanyl use. Officers frequently cite Propositions 47 and 57 when asked why enforcement is not occurring. This is unacceptable. We urge you to declare parks and libraries Zero-Tolerance Zones and direct SDPD to enforce the law with a specific emphasis on parks and libraries. We also urge the City Attorney’s Office to consider stay-away orders for those who repeatedly choose to use our parks and libraries for criminal activity.
2. **Fund increased police patrols in parks:** We urge you to consider increased funding for SDPD to conduct additional patrols that target community parks throughout the city, especially in high-crime areas and fully restore beach patrols. Additionally, we fully support your work with the County to integrate additional Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams with SDPD units, and call for additional behavioral health resources, including but not limited to Mobile Crisis Response Teams. As part of the Fiscal Year 2024 budget cycle, we also urge you to consider one-time capital expenditures aimed at securing our parks and libraries. This includes but is not limited to: Zero-Tolerance Zone signage, lighting that does not disturb neighbors, metal detectors at Central Library, and security cameras.
3. **Enhance inter-agency coordination:** We urge you to hold recurring meetings of the San Diego Police Department, Sheriff’s Department, City Attorney, District Attorney, Probation Department, and the Presiding Judge to regularly coordinate around serial offenders who frequent park and library facilities. Repeat offenders and those who pose the greatest threat to our community are regularly back on the street within 24 hours of arrest. By meeting on a recurring basis, departments will have an opportunity to better coordinate and prioritize those individuals who pose the greatest risk. Regular meetings with inter-agency departments will also enhance the ability of elected offices to advocate for state and federal legislative changes to help support those who protect and serve.

The current state of public safety places San Diego’s world-class parks system and library programming at undue risk. Dangers posed by those with ill intent threaten the ability of the public to safely broaden one’s mind and exercise. Preserving the status quo will leave many families without safe and accessible neighborhood services, and further threaten employee recruitment and retention.

We hope that you will consider these recommendations.

Sincerely,

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| Mission Bay Park Committee | <insert> |
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<insert cc’s: Chloe Madison, Chief Nisleit, Mara Elliott, Summer Stephan, Anthony Ray, Board of Supervisors, City Council>