

September 22, 2021

Dear elected officials, public officials, and service providers involved in the August 27<sup>th</sup> displacement of a camp on CalTrans property near the south end of San Clemente:

We, unhoused community members who were living in the camp on CalTrans property near the south end of San Clemente, are asking you to **be honest about the lack of appropriate services and resources to address our needs.** On Friday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, CalTrans dismantled the camp where many of us had lived peacefully for over a year. Service providers were there to offer “resources,” but none of them offered us appropriate housing for our needs that would lead to permanent housing. So, here we are, still on the streets of San Clemente--and characterized as “service resistant” and refusing offers of help. **Admit that the process of getting assistance is lengthy, that there is not enough housing for everyone who qualifies for it, and that there are people on the street who do want help and are doing what they’re supposed to do to receive it.**

What we really want is for you to at least be honest about our plight. As it is now, we are blamed for being unhoused in a county that does not offer safe, permanent, affordable housing as an immediate response to people with needs like ours.

Also, people say, “They’re not from here.” **Please, tell the truth that we’re from here!** Twenty of us (almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of us) were either born and raised here or have lived here for ten or more years! Only three people are from out of the area, and they just got here. We belong here. This is our home as much as any of the rest of you.

People believe we were all offered shelter and refused. How can this be when there are virtually no shelters around here, and the one shelter that was supposedly offered to everyone (it wasn’t) is mostly full, and only had three beds to offer for 25+ people? And anyway, shelters are obviously not a safe option because COVID risk is high. Would you place your loved one in a mass shelter during the pandemic? Don’t offer us something you know we can’t do and then say we refused it. **Be honest: shelters can’t work for everyone.**

It is incredibly traumatic to be mischaracterized by people in power and the service providers who allow half-truths to look like whole truths. They should be advocating for us! It is even more traumatic to then experience hatred and rejection in our community because people don’t know the whole truth --mostly because public officials and professionals don’t tell the whole truth. Some people literally think, “They’ve all been offered housing, and have refused.” **Please, set the record straight! Be honest!**

One last thing: how will the system ever be fixed if no one just tells it like it is? As long as it looks like it’s all on us, no one will ever see the need to do better. **Tell the truth about the lack of resources instead of allowing everyone to blame us for a system that fails us.**

Sincerely,

Eleven former encampment residents  
(Anonymously signed for privacy)