

September 15, 2023

Dear Mayor Duncan, City Council Members, and City Manager Hall,

Something bad happened to five unhoused San Clemente residents last weekend while everyone else in town was celebrating the arrival of the Rip Curl WSL Finals. We are writing to express our dismay at the incident and urge the city to adopt procedures to prevent anything similar from happening again.

On Friday, September 8, the eve of the WSL Finals, someone in city government was unhappy with the “optics” of five unhoused people living in tents near the site of a famed surf contest which aimed to draw large crowds of tourists and locals. To change those “unpleasant optics,” the city had a member of its Homeless Outreach team persuade these five unhoused people to vacate their camping site, put their tents and other belongings in city storage, and move into motel rooms. The outreach worker organized Uber/Lyft rides for three of the residents to a motel in Dana Point and the other two to a motel in San Clemente.

What followed was a stressful, emotionally painful ordeal for five of San Clemente’s most vulnerable residents, including a disabled senior. Rather than organize a carefully-planned temporary motel stay for these five people, city staff effectively abandoned them at the motels: The city made no provision for their meals during the motel stay, nor did the city give them a ride back to the campsite or help transport their belongings there from storage.

Distressingly, the **three people brought to the Dana Point motel** did not know on Friday how many nights they could expect to stay. Throughout the next morning (Saturday), with a potential check-out deadline looming, the outreach worker still could not tell them whether they had to check out that day or could stay another night. Finally, just before 11:00 A.M., the outreach worker told them that they indeed had to check out that day. Moreover the worker’s shift was ending at 11:00am and the worker would be “unavailable” until 6:00 A.M. the following day. **The staff offered no return transport from Dana Point to their campsite and identified no other city worker they could contact for help.**

**These three homeless San Clemente residents, with little money and no transportation, had been dumped in another city with no way home. The anxiety and sense of betrayal cut deep. Compounding that distress was their concern about getting their belongings out of city storage.**

In fact, all five unhoused residents were extremely worried they would not have their belongings to use for camping Saturday night. Their blankets, tents, cooking gear, food supplies – all necessities of life for unhoused people – were now in storage. They did have a phone number to call to retrieve their belongings, but after the neglect they experienced at the motels (no food or return transport), they had no faith they would get their things back for that night’s use. And they certainly had no way to transport their many stored things back to their campsite.

Thankfully, a compassionate individual with a large vehicle learned of their plight and helped prevent further suffering. That individual brought the three stranded in Dana Point back to San Clemente and then helped all five unhoused people transport their belongings from the storage facility back to the campsite. (When these unhoused residents had called the “belongings retrieval” phone number and asked for their things to be transported back to their campsite, they were told staff could only release the items from storage, not transport anything.)

**It is a stunning fact that only a Good Samaritan’s intervention prevented these five unhoused San Clemente residents from being left on the street – three in another city—with no provisions, separated from their camping supplies and other belongings.**

**This heartless treatment of unhoused people must not recur.** San Clemente must never again let concerns over the “bad optics” of visible homelessness lead to city action (and neglect) which puts unhoused people in harm’s way. **Accordingly, we urge the city to adopt the following protocol when it asks individuals to move from a camping site on public property:**

- 1) Provide a minimum of three nights’ stay in a motel.
- 2) Provide three meals a day for those three days, or \$75 per day or the equivalent in vouchers for food accessible at places near the motel.
- 3) Provide return transportation to the camping site the individuals were asked to vacate, or transportation to an equivalent safe camping site within the city acceptable to the individuals.
- 4) Provide safe and accessible storage for their personal belongings, as well as free transport of those items back to the original camping site (or the individuals’ preferred site within the city) within three hours of motel checkout.
- 5) Assistance with all relocation tasks, including dismantling and packing belongings, and unpacking and setting tents back up, should be offered.
- 6) Appoint a city staff member to serve as a contact for assistance throughout their displacement.

**Please reply to this letter by September 21 to let us know what the city plans to do in the future.** Obviously, the city’s treatment of its unhoused residents as described above reflects poorly on San Clemente. We want a commitment that this will not happen again.

Sincerely,

*(Signatories on next page.)*

Kathy Esfahani, Chair  
San Clemente Affordable Housing Coalition



Pat Davis & David Duran, Co-Facilitators  
Housing is a Human Right OC



Rona Henry, Chair  
Welcoming Neighbors Home



Rev. Kent Doss, Minister  
Tapestry Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation



Anna Strasburg Davis, San Clemente resident, Director of Pro Bono Program  
Rev. Juli Patten, Pastor of Christ Lutheran Church  
Rev. Patrick Crerar, Rector of St. Clemente by-the-Sea Episcopal Church  
Fr. Bill Barman, Catholic Diocese of Orange  
Donna Vidrine, San Clemente Resident, Co-chair of San Clemente Homeless Collaborative  
M. Kathleen Bousquet-Faust, San Clemente Resident  
Ashly Fox, San Clemente Resident  
Linda Yeargin, San Clemente Resident  
Denise Fleury, San Clemente Resident  
Rick DiBello, San Clemente Resident  
Stuart Anderson, San Clemente Resident

CC: Mike Frost, Dana Point Mayor

Jamey Federico, Dana Point Mayor Pro Tem

John Gabbard, Matthew Pagano & Michael Villar – Dana Point City Councilmembers

Michael Killebrew, Dana Point City Manager