

April 25, 2019

To: Supervisors Haney, Mandelman, Stefani, Walton

Cc: Mayor London Breed

Re: Submitted comments to Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee during hearing on Open Air Drug Dealing in the Tenderloin, Civic Center, Mid Market, and SoMa.

Comments:

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First we want to thank the committee for holding the hearing, Supervisor Haney for calling this hearing, the City departments presenting today, and the many people taking time out to be here.

My name is Kate Robinson and I represent Tenderloin Community Benefit District, an organization that is an investment on behalf of Tenderloin property owners to benefit the whole community. Our purpose is to lead the evolution of the Tenderloin into a vibrant community for all. We are governed by a Board of directors comprised of Tenderloin residents, business, and property owners. We strive always to represent a collective voice for the many diverse communities who comprise the neighborhood fabric.

I have worked in the neighborhood for 10 years, and am a founder of Safe Passage, which is a neighborhood-wide collaborative program that is a direct response to parents' voiced concerns for their children's safety when walking through the Tenderloin. Prior to this work, I served residents in an affordable housing site where I now bring my daughter for childcare with her godmother.. I love this neighborhood.

We as Safe Passage Corner Captains stand at high injury intersections, and witness dozens of emergency situations each month – nearly all of them stemming from the open-air drug market that exists on the streets of the Tenderloin. Many times we are the first responders to incidents of violence, medical emergencies, self-harm, all as hundreds of children are walking home from school. The Tenderloin is home to the highest density of children and the 2nd highest density of seniors in San Francisco. We serve them each day with the mission of building a culture of safety.

I want to recognize that we have come here today around the topic of open drug dealing in our central city neighborhoods, the heart of our city, but we are actually here for something much deeper. To address this issue we must work to understand how it came

to be, that the largest open-air drug market in Northern California is concentrated in a low-income neighborhood of color. And that by doing so we will come to unpack and understand we are talking about community trauma, generational poverty, health disparities, and systemic racism. Those are the enemies to rally against. In this room, we can't point to one department to blame or to solve this issue. There is no individual agency, department, or organization, who has failed. Together, we are all failing. We are especially failing the residents of the Tenderloin who should have equitable access and opportunity to thrive as any other residents of this city.

I want to share with you, some stories that we have heard through community conversations, surveys, and relationships that illustrate some of the harms happening in this community. This is a small diverse sample, but is by no means representative of the full scale or range of the impact – particularly on low-income people of color:

This is a Tenderloin business owner

My customers and staff have been threatened. I am struggling to keep my business going.

This is from a 37-year-old man who, at the time of talking with us, was on the verge of homelessness

I started selling drugs at the age of 9. Before I was 17 I had \$100,000 of my own money. I thought I had everything. I saw a guy get his head blown off right in front of me. I was 13. I've been robbed. I spent 7 years in federal penitentiary. It slowed me down, but I can't stop.

This person lives and works in the Tenderloin with their partner

The tenants in my building are all senior citizens and many voice their fear to leave the building on a daily basis... My partner is harassed on a daily basis and has been assaulted twice on the street.

This is from a mother who was once 'on the other side' of this, expressing concern for her son:

It's not fair to him that that all of the drugs are all right here - he can't walk alone, he can't ride his bike out of fear ... he can't go into the stores. These corner stores deal drugs. Why? Why only here?

This is a Tenderloin resident who is a senior

[I've been] in recovery for the last 15 years or more. I really don't need to see all of the sales going on Turk St. All day long.

This one is from a Tenderloin resident and father who is a part of one of our immigrant communities, expressing concern for a young family member who grew up in the Tenderloin

It started with marijuana and now he sells other drugs. This is a kid. He grew up here. We are losing our kids. He lost everything with this problem - and now 5 more from our community are joining him.

This is from a woman who has lived in the Tenderloin for 10 years, she lives next a senior housing building and within 3 blocks from two schools.

it has never been as bad as it's been for the last year...A woman was stabbed two nights ago right in front of our door and a man overdosed a few hours later in the same spot. Pre-teen girls are sexually harassed and offered drugs while going to and from school. These are all real things that happen inside our building and to our neighbors.

This person has worked in the neighborhood 6 days a week for 34 years. She regularly interacts and creates relationships with people on the sidewalk.

Drug dealing creates drama and sometimes violence in a way other street activities common in the TL (bbqing, barbering, music listening, hanging with neighbors) do not. So it brings danger and stress.

This person is employed by a mid-market tech company

I empathize with the dealers that systemic factors likely lead them to selling drugs as means to survive. As a sister of an addict, it makes me sick to see people profiting off of the most vulnerable population in our city.

Many more here will share varying experiences, opinions, and ideas, (and I hope everyone stick around to hear from them) but what we **are united** on is that the status quo regarding the persistence and prevalence of open-air drug dealing in the Tenderloin is **untenable**. Open air drug dealing contributes significantly to a deteriorated environment and unhealthy public spaces that leads to long-term, negative health impacts on all segments of the Tenderloin population (housed and un-housed, families, single residents, seniors, drug users and drug dealers).

We also cannot rely on one department alone to address the complexities of a decades long open-air drug market. According to Fiscal Year 17/18 data, almost 60% of narcotics bookings and citations are happening in the Tenderloin, and this number is likely even higher this year. Yet we experience no substantive change or improvements on the streets. Community trauma persists. It is clear that traditional enforcement has proven to be inadequate. We need more effective strategies.

Specific Asks:

Supervisors, many community leaders and residents strongly recommend and support the formation of a City Task Force:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing strategies addressing open air drug dealing in the Tenderloin
- To comprehensively examine why open air drug dealing is so persistent and prevalent in the Tenderloin and understand the true factors that keep it firmly in place.
- To surface innovative policy and programmatic solutions

Within the framework of a Task Force we also recommend:

- Representation from all relevant city departments, not just the Police Department
- Strong resident representation, especially subject matter experts
- Utilize the five pillars of Prevention, Harm Reduction, Treatment, Enforcement, Economic Opportunity
- That adequately resourced by the City Administration

This is an invitation to partnership. We have never had more committed multi sector partners and residents ready to work on this. We have seen great models of success in the Tenderloin when voiced resident concerns are met with committed partnership and resources. This is the opportunity for San Francisco to lead in the nation's most challenging issues, right here in the Tenderloin, to have thoughtful, community driven strategies to begin understanding the complexities, and to work towards a comprehensive strategy on healing community trauma.

Thank you,

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