

California Peace Coalition

July 28, 2021

Sheriff Alex Villanueva
Hall of Justice
211 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 229-1700

Dear Sheriff Villanueva,

Thank you for taking action to end the homeless encampments in Venice Beach with care and compassion. The failure of both the state of California and the city of Los Angeles to deal with this increasingly dangerous and deadly situation required that you take action. We are grateful that you did so thoughtfully and with the active involvement of social service providers, since homeless encampments are a result of addiction and untreated mental illness, as well as a source of crime.

Unfortunately, the problem of open air drug dealing and use has spread and worsened across the state. It requires immediate and dramatic action at both county and state levels. We have formed a coalition to respond to the crisis of rising drug deaths and drug encampments in California, and would like to meet with you on Friday to coordinate action, including with local policymakers, other Sheriffs, and U.S. District Judge David O. Carter.

We are parents of children killed recently by fentanyl, recovering addicts, and concerned citizens who have come together around a comprehensive solution to California's homeless, drug, and mental illness problems. The California Peace Coalition is a movement fighting to end the drug death crisis, protect our children, and save our cities.

We propose a change that will solve the problem, in contrast to the half-measures that have been repeatedly tried and failed. We propose the centralization of mental health and addiction services at the state level through a new agency, Cal-Psych, given the failure of counties to solve the problem; temporary shelter for all who need it, and the requirement that it be used; the enforcement of laws against public camping, defecation, and drug use; and the restoration of mandatory addiction and psychiatric treatment as an alternative to jail and prison.

We believe there is a middle path between mass homelessness and mass incarceration. We need county sheriffs from across the state to coordinate law enforcement efforts, given the highly transient nature of California's addicted homeless population, and the networks of criminal gangs overseeing drug sales and thefts. We need county governments to step up in their leadership. And we need to see California's governor directly involved in creating real solutions, including a coordinated state-wide response.

But we cannot wait for others to act and must ourselves take responsibility. If political leaders at the state, county, and city levels continue failing to protect public safety, then you must act, and you will have our support. Homicides are rising across California. Drug addiction and drug dealing are rising fast, with nationwide drug deaths growing from 71,000 to 93,000 between 2019 and 2020. And the crimes associated with addiction, including shoplifting and other forms of theft and burglary, are rising too.

It is unacceptable that people are being assaulted and murdered outside their homes, as occurred with one of our founding members yesterday morning. It is unacceptable that cities are enabling hard drug use, crime, and violence. And it is unacceptable that parents across California are finding their children dead from fentanyl poisoning.

We recognize that this is a complex challenge that will require good will and good intentions on all sides. We take the responsibility of developing policies and institutions to deal with rising drug deaths and spreading drug encampments very seriously. Our website explains our agenda and describes the way cities across the

United States, and in Europe, have closed open drug scenes and homeless encampments: with an intelligent and compassionate mixture of carrots and sticks, law enforcement and services.

Thank you again and we look forward to meeting with you about how, together, we can take responsibility for the dangerous and immoral situation that is killing our children, degrading our cities, and destroying human dignity..

Sincerely,

- Andy Bales, Union Rescue Mission, Skid Row, Los Angeles
- Jacqui Berlinn, Founder and President, Stop Fentanyl Deaths
- Steve Filson, Jessica's Dad, Secretary, V.O.I.D., Victims of Illicit Drugs
- Hugh Sharkey
- Michelle Leopold, We Are Not Alone Coalition
- Sen. Gloria Romero, former Democratic majority leader, California State Senate (2001 - 2008)
- Gina McDonald, recovering addict and parent of an addict
- Soledad Ursua, Venice for Peace
- Chie Lunn, Venice for Peace
- Michael Shellenberger, Environmental Progress
- Gabrielle Haigh, Environmental Progress
- Jaime Puerta, President of V.O.I.D. "Victims of Illicit Drugs". Daniel J. Puerta's Dad
- George Francisco, President Venice Chamber of Commerce
- Tom Wolf, Recovery Education Coalition
- Amy Neville, President of Alexander Neville Foundation, Alexander Neville's Mom
- Matt Capelouto, Alexandra's Dad President of Drug Induced Homicide