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HOLLYWOOD UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
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June 28, 2021

Sent Via E-Mail

TO: Council District 4, Nithya Raman, CD4 Councilmember

Cc: Eric Garcetti, Chief Joe Losorelli, Nury Martinez, Mitch O'Farrell, Chief Armando Hogan, Mark Ridley-Thomas, Kevin De Leon, Joe Buscaino, Monica Rodriguez

RE: April 12, 2021, Encampment Incident at the Old Zoo, Griffith Park

Dear Councilmember Raman:

As you are aware, on April 12, 2021, an incident occurred involving your staff and people who relocated from the Echo Park homeless encampments into the Old Zoo area of Griffith Park. Several people with criminal history and off-leash animals assembled tents in that area. Also present during enforcement was Tabatha Yelos, who indicated they were there under the aegis of CD4, actively assisting in setting up the occupants, with said actions documented by photos. When rangers advised them that they must disassemble, Yelos indicated that their occupation required services and housing. Yelos was advised that this known contingency was offered and denied. Chief Joe Losorelli explained the applicable laws as well as the location being a Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zone. He advised that continued interference would result in arrest. Four arrests were made that evening.

This incident is concerning and problematic on many fronts.

HUNC is deeply concerned that you have not been transparent on this issue, have not released any public statement, have not indicated potential disciplinary action for staff, nor given publicized assurances that an incident like this will not recur. Multiple individuals and organizations have requested such a statement which has yet to be produced.

Parks in Los Angeles, and especially Griffith Park, do not permit overnight occupation or encampments. Griffith Park is an urban wilderness and wildlife park. The environmental damage

sustained by Echo Park was significant, and it is logical to correlate this potential damage and potential consequences to Griffith Park with encampments. Additionally, the whole of Griffith Park is in a Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zone, compounded by the exceptionally dry conditions of the park this year. The potential to destroy wildlife habitat is real.

Since this incident, we have been advised that CD4 did not instruct any staff to install occupants into the park. Based on documentation, it's unclear if Yelos was operating in an official capacity or unofficial capacity.

We respectfully request the following:

1. A public statement from CD4 that it actively supports and upholds the ordinances regarding "Trespassing in a Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zone", "Erected Tent on Park Property or Attachments to Park Property", "Loitering in Park After Hours" (LAMC codes 57.4908.8, 63.44B269(d), 63.44B26(e), 63.44B14(a), respectively) which includes the prohibition of encampment within all City Parks, and especially in Griffith Park. It is unclear if your office actively supports this prohibition and will diligently prevent illegal occupation.
2. An investigation of staff, with appropriate action taken, with a subsequent public statement denouncing such activity. It has been reported Yelos identified themselves to the rangers as CD4 staff and advocated to them to maintain occupancy of the encampment. They interfered with the park rangers' investigation and action to the point where they were advised to stop or there would be consequences.
3. A commitment to address the concern that there may be a conflict of interest with organizations that assisted in your election. Staff may be using their access as your employees to use resources and contacts for the pursuit of their own goals that may be in opposition to the law and policy, and in conflict with the constituents that are to be served in CD4.

LA City Charter Chapter 222 contains conflict of interest standards based on "appearance" and the Attorney General has found that "(t)he common law doctrine against conflicts of interest prohibit public officials from placing themselves in a position where their private, personal interests may conflict with their duties." 64 Ops Ca. Atty Gen 795 outlines "(a) public officer is impliedly bound to exercise the powers conferred on him with diligence and primarily for the benefit of the public" (Noble v. City of Palo Alto 89 Cal. App 47, 51). It is unclear if this incident indicates that Yelos was performing their duties without bias which is critical as public officials must not act as if they have a bias that prevents them from doing so.

As committed elected members of a Neighborhood Council, our role is to be a meaningful voice of the community. A City Council member and their staff should follow the same standards of professionalism, transparency, and civic responsibility.

We look forward to your response on these matters.

Very truly yours,

George Skarpelos*
President

Tom Meredith*
Vice President

Erin Penner*
Chair, Public Safety and
Emergency Preparedness Committee

*signed electronically