

DRAFT

May 24, 2021

TO: Council District 4, Nithya Raman, CD4 Councilmember

Cc: Eric Garcetti, Chief Joe Losorelli-Rec and Parks, Nury Martinez, Mitch O'Farrell, Chief Armando Hogan LAFD OWB, Mark Ridley-Thomas, KEVIN DE LEON, JOE BUSCAINO, MONICA RODRIGUEZ

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

Dear Councilmember Raman:

As you are aware, on April 12, 2021, an incident involving your staff and relocation of Echo Park homeless exiles into the Old Zoo area of Griffith Park occurred. At that time, previous occupants of Echo Park had begun to set up camp at this location. At least 7 tents were erected with others attempting to assemble, with off-leash animals including pit bulls. Additionally, the people relocating were documented by Park Rangers as a known danger to park workers, rangers, park visitors, and were extorting occupants at Echo Park to maintain the ability to stay in the park. This group, which included Ayman Ahmed, has had members involved in gun violence in Echo Park and were openly involved in extorting "street tax" from Echo Park occupants. Also present upon enforcement were Tabatha Yelos and Ashley Bennett, 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 the "staff" and occupants that they must disassemble, Tabatha Yelos indicated that their occupation then required services and housing, and she was advised that this known contingency was offered and denied. Additionally, they were not ongoing occupants but had just arrived. Chief Joe Losorelli advised on the laws as well as the location being a High Fire Severity Zone. Tabatha and Ashley continued to prevent the rangers from performing their duties. Chief Losorelli advised Tabatha that continued interference would result in arrest. Four arrests were made that evening.

This incident is concerning and problematic on many fronts.

Throughout your candidacy and in recent posts on NextDoor you have indicated directly that transparency is critical to your administration. For this reason, HUNC is deeply concerned that you have not been transparent on this issue, have released no public statement, have not indicated 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.

The parks, and especially Griffith Park, do not permit occupation. Griffith Park is a wildlife park. The environmental damage sustained by Echo Park was significant: initial reports indicated 30 lbs. of sharps, 450 lbs. of biological waste, 37.5 tons of solid waste, 300 lbs. of hazardous waste (paint, sharp objects and drug paraphernalia), death and damage to the water fauna of the lake and \$600k in damages. It is logical to correlate this potential damage and potential consequences to Griffith Park. Additionally, the whole of Griffith Park is in a High Fire Severity Zone, compounded by the exceptionally dry conditions of the park this year. The potential to destroy wildlife habitat is real, as is the potential for predatory

animals to engage with the dogs. Though no encampment is permissible even with the meekest of occupants, the lack of due diligence on researching the group and supporting the staff participating in the relocation of these occupants should also be noted as these individuals were a danger to both staff and patrons of Griffith Park.

Since this incident, we have been advised that CD4 did not instruct any staff to install occupants into the park. Also, though, we have been told that Tabatha Yelos advised CD4 staff at the time that there were occupants in urgent/immediate need of services, and Tabatha was called to the location to assist in helping current occupants with this. Based on documentation, it's unclear if Tabatha was operating in an official capacity or unofficial capacity on behalf of CD4 and Nithya Raman.

We request the following:

- 1) A public statement from CD4 that it actively supports and upholds the ordinances regarding "Trespassing in a Very High Fire 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) which includes the prohibition of encampment within all the City Parks, and especially in Griffith Park. It is unclear if your office supports this actively and with diligence to prevent illegal occupation.
- 2) An investigation of staff, disciplinary action with potential for termination, with a subsequent public statement denouncing such activity. Tabatha Yelos and Ashley Bennett identified themselves to Rangers as staff of CD4, with Yelos advocating to rangers to maintain occupancy. Both interfered with the Park Rangers investigation and action to the point where both were advised to stop or there would be consequences. Since the time of the incident, it has been learned that though they identified themselves as CD4, which implies on behalf of CD4, CD4 says that they were not. Ms. Bennett is especially concerning as she misleadingly identified herself as CD4 staff and is not. Ms. Bennett also has a history while at LAHSA of dissuading the use of services while an employee of the agency, creating a fund to keep occupants in Echo Park. The actions of the two make it seem like they believe the ends justifies the means. It does not. When one takes on a position in an administration the assumption is that the allegiance falls to the administration.

There also needs to be confirmation that employees inside CD4 are not utilizing city resources for Ground Game objectives, including, but not limited to, phones, email, equipment, working hours. This also applies to Tabatha Yelos herself. Taxpayer funds should not be utilized for purposes not under CD4 aegis, as this is very strong concern of Hollywood United Neighborhood Council.

- 3) A public statement of assurance that you are not beholden to Ground Game should be made. Based on the staff incident, there is concern that as the organization strongly assisted in your election that you are now indebted to it, and if not support it, will not actively pursue when the methods are questionable at best. There is also concern that because there has been no transparency, that CD4 is not vested in its constituents. During your campaign you regularly alluded to Ryu being beholden to campaign contributors. This issue is now your issue. You were strongly assisted by Ground Game and have staff from the organization, staff who is more vested in its own goals than the stakeholders of CD4, as demonstrated by this April incident. Staff may be using their access as your employees to use resources and contacts to pursue 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, and “(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 Tabatha Yelos is capable of performing her duties without bias which is critical as public officials must not act as if they have a bias that prevents them from doing their duties.

As committed elected members of a neighborhood council, we know very well that our role is to be the voice of the community and the majority. 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 this matter.