

San Diego City Council

05/11/2020

Prepared Testimony regarding Keeping Communities Safe

Good Morning Council President Gómez and city councilmembers,

My name is Chelsey Birgisdottir. I am a policy associate at the ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties and am here today speaking with the Coalition for Police Accountability and Transparency.

During this time, it is especially important that people in our region are treated with fairness and compassion, and that individuals' lives aren't jeopardized by needless detainment or incarceration.

We urge you to call on Chief Nisleit and City Attorney Elliott to save lives by deprioritizing low-level offenses, including bench warrants and parole violations; by decriminalizing homelessness and other poverty-related offenses – ending fines, fees and jail time – and lastly; by not requiring bail for misdemeanors.

Public education should be prioritized over enforcement. San Diego Police Department officers should speak with people to explain the rules they are expected to follow – such as practicing physical distancing or wearing face coverings in public – rather than arresting or citing people unnecessarily.

Additionally, the city should protect peoples' right to privacy by not utilizing mass surveillance technology such as drones or streetlight cameras.

We are counting on you, our elected representatives, to act responsibly in this unprecedented public health crisis. We must acknowledge that COVID-19 is fundamentally a public health issue, not a law enforcement or criminal justice issue. This means that we must respond to this crisis in a manner that preserves San Diegans' health and wellbeing.

Thank you for your time.