

From: [Laing, Rachel](#)
To: [Scott Lewis](#)
Subject: Re: Walton emails
Date: Thursday, September 15, 2022 2:15:46 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Hi, Scott,

Bill's frustration over our homelessness crisis is shared by people across our city, including the mayor himself, and in cities across the United States. In addition to this being a problem that cities and states across the country are grappling with, it's also important to note that homelessness in San Diego did not start overnight. This crisis has been decades in the making, and what we see now is a product of multiple administrations not meaningfully dealing with the issue.

But to the issue at hand that stoked Bill's ire: As Voice of San Diego has covered, people living on the streets since the pandemic seem to be in worse straits than ever, with more behavioral health and substance abuse issues than we've seen prior to the pandemic. In our efforts to address the neighborhood impacts of homelessness -- particularly encampments and the trash and unsanitary conditions that result from them -- our crews are finding an increase in hoarding behaviors and anti-social behavior such as vandalism and unwillingness to put trash in available nearby receptacles.

The reality is that the city doesn't have carte blanche to fully remediate encampments, but we are doing everything we can within the confines of the restrictions created by legal settlements and Supreme Court decisions regarding how we may clear encampments and dispose of items in the public right of way. We obviously also have to respect people's civil rights.

The City and its Housing Commission are doing everything within our power and authority to create more shelter beds and options that are suitable to the needs of all the members of our unsheltered population, including non-congregate shelters and shelters that serve people with behavioral health and substance use disorders. We are turning over every stone to create places for people to go to get off the streets, as evidenced by the hundreds of beds we've added to the system in the past year and a half.

We've stood up a coordinated outreach program to connect people living in encampments to shelter, services and housing and have been successful, through these sustained efforts, in getting service-resistant folks to accept help.

The mayor has leveraged his excellent relationships at the state and federal level and the acumen of his government affairs team to garner funding and legislation to address homelessness. We are getting housing built as quickly as possible and doing everything we can to streamline that. And as you know, the mayor has been a leading advocate for behavioral health interventions that will address the crisis that has only become worse from the trauma of the pandemic and an epidemic of fentanyl/opioid use.

The engine we've built is, in fact, working. Our shelters are full and over 500 formerly homeless people were connected to housing straight from our shelter system this year. We're also making

strides on housing. The Community Homelessness Action Plan from 2019 determined the City needed to create or identify an additional 5,416 housing options by 2029, and today – just three years in -- we're 60% of the way to that goal. The goal obviously is going to be revisited, but the fact is, we have an engine that works.

What's also critical to address is the upstream factors that are causing people to fall into homelessness more quickly than we can pull people out of it. Housing shortages and spiraling costs, a broken health and behavioral health care system, and other factors that are largely outside of the control of city government.

But the mayor is putting the full weight and force of this office to address homelessness-related issues that are in the City's domain. People can be frustrated and angry about the situation, but they cannot expect the mayor to wave a magic wand. They can only expect him to work extremely hard and deploy all available resources to improve things. And that's exactly what he's doing.

Thanks for letting me describe the challenge and how we're tackling it. Feel free to use any of this as you need to.

RL

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