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San Francisco Police Chief William Scott Releases Statement Regarding Tenderloin Narcotics Enforcement and the 2021 Racial Justice Act 22-121

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Recently, several media platforms have reported on allegations raised in motions in criminal court under California Penal Code section 745 (the Racial Justice Act), alleging SFPD members are engaging in racially targeted narcotics arrests in the Tenderloin.

The purpose of this law is to ensure that race plays no role in convictions or sentencing. We, as a department, are committed to this purpose and continue to work diligently to prevent biased policing in our city. One of the many ways we have demonstrated this commitment is through our work on the Collaborative Reform Initiative. To date, we have implemented 90% of the 272 reform recommendations in that Initiative and have been lauded by the New York Times as a major city department where police reform has worked.

Everyone who lives or works in the Tenderloin, or who visits the neighborhood is likely aware of the open-air drug sales that plague the Tenderloin. The rampant dealing, drug use, and resulting epidemic of overdoses are a threat to this vibrant neighborhood that is central to our city.

Community concerns and requests for service are a crucial factor informing my directives for SFPD operations. A common demand from an overwhelming majority of the Tenderloin community – those most harmed by the drug dealing and its attendant danger and blight – is for the San Francisco Police Department to enforce our state’s criminal laws and arrest those selling deadly drugs. That is exactly what I have directed our members to do: identify and arrest anyone observed selling illegal drugs, build strong cases, and save lives. San Francisco Police Department officers must carry out this policing in accordance with Department policy, California law, and the Constitution. And they do.

So far this year, the San Francisco Police Department has made over 300 arrests for narcotics crimes in the Tenderloin. In the course of this work, our officers have seized nearly 50,000 grams (110 pounds) of illegal drugs, including 32,000 grams (70 pounds) of deadly fentanyl.

I recognize that combatting the scourge of open-air drug dealing, drug use, and overdose death is complex. There is no single, agreed upon approach to the problem and no one City Department, alone, can fix it. In our particular role of enforcing the law, the SFPD must continue to arrest individuals observed selling illegal drugs in the Tenderloin.

To the members of the San Francisco Police Department: holding accountable those responsible for supplying deadly drugs on our streets requires us to arrest the individuals we observe committing these crimes, seize their illegal drugs and profits, and refer their cases to our City’s prosecutors. This is what the public has demanded of us. And as peace officers tasked with ensuring the safety of our communities, this is what we demand of ourselves.

As long as our officers arrest drug dealers in accordance with San Francisco Police Department policy, California law, and the Constitution, I will support them, and I will defend their work. I ask the public to do the same.

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