

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS, SAN FRANCISCO  
TIMELINE AND STATEMENT ON DIVISION STREET SWEEPS**

The following is our documentation of the timeline of events that led up to and occurred during the encampment removal on Division Street that culminated on March 1, 2016.

The Coalition on Homelessness met with DPW representatives on October 2, 2015 asking for much needed sanitation resources and bathrooms for Division Street; they instead installed them in a location that is closer to residential areas thus garnering more complaints, but far fewer homeless people, and is 2 blocks from another bathroom.

In the weeks leading up to Superbowl City, which opened January 27, 2016, homeless people were moved away from the downtown area [north of 7th](#) including the Wharf, Embarcadero, and Financial District, many of whom reported being told to head towards Division to avoid further police harassment by police officers and department of public works employees. That action along, with heavy rains, drove upward the number of campers along Division Street under the freeway. At its peak there were about 175 tents, with a conservative estimate of at least 300 individuals in tents, tiny structures or on the sidewalk.

On February 5, the DPH HOT Team started to notify individuals of available beds at Pier 80 Shelter; a temporary winter shelter constructed by the city in response to the El Nino Rains that will remain open until March 31. The city decided to limit continuous access to Division Street residents alone.

The shelter's opening and ability to accommodate homeless individuals was severely strained by a pre-mature opening. Only 20 homeless individuals were allowed the first several nights and it was at full capacity its first night. However, HOT team workers were given misinformation about the shelter that created false expectations for campers, electricity failures, toilets and showers were not working properly, and it was reported that an off-duty sheriff who was working security used physical force on a client and handcuffed him to a chair in front of

the other clients. The following day seventeen of the twenty shelter residents left, and two left shortly after that, sharing their experiences to others on the street, creating a reasonable sense of fear and distrust of the city's alternative. Nonetheless, Pier 80's capacity grew from 20 people to 150 people as the city expanded it, reaching full capacity every evening according to the shelter's manager, Lessie Benedith. Within a short time, bathrooms were working properly and Sheriff's were no longer employed after the first night.

On Feb 9th, Rainbow Grocery sent a letter to the Mayor asking for help with encampments, in the form of bathrooms, garbage service, and housing placement. Their intent was intimated as support for the sweeps by SF Chronicle columnist CW Nevius.

During the week and over the weekend leading up to February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the SF Chronicle wrote several columns and editorials calling for the dismantling of tents along Division Street. Many of these articles included false information, later confirmed by city officials and service providers regarding the Pier's capacity and amenities.

On Tuesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Cal Trans and CHP engaged in a mass removal of the section of Division including illegal property destruction at around 12pm on Division street. This destruction of property including tents, belongings, and a walker of a homeless veteran known by the DPH HOT team and Coalition outreach team on hand was caught by videotape and posted on social media, receiving over 100,000 views.

Later on that same day on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, *after* the initial sweeps, the Department of Public Health issued orders of abatement and ordered campers to vacate based on health abatement within 72 hours. Frontline HOT team workers of the Department of Public Health as well as Department of Public Work Street cleaners, and SFPD officers reported having received no notice, let alone consultation of the health notice until posted.

On February 25, about 300 people showed up for a hearing at City Hall on homelessness calling for solutions to the crisis. Many called for bathrooms, halting the sweeps garbage service, exits off the streets.

On the night of February 25<sup>th</sup> we counted 72 tents, 4 other tiny structures, and 6 sleeping on the sidewalk in the area specified for abatement. At this point, 100 campers had been housed at Pier 80, which was nearing capacity. In addition, the displacements started having an impact on neighboring areas. For example, a nearby site increased to 33 tents from 16 the day before.

On Friday February 26, threatened sweeps were to take place in the morning. About 100 protestors showed up at the early hours and no sweeps took place. Later that day, the Department of Public Health issued orders of abatement and ordered campers to vacate based on health abatement within 72 hours on San Bruno Ave, down the street from Division.

On Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, starting at 4:30 am, police accompanied Department of Public Works crews and told people to move for cleaning. Expecting to come back, DPW put up barriers instead preventing their return. Encampments surrounding Division swelled even higher. One area went from 3 tents to 30, another from 13 to 30. About 14 navigation center beds were offered. Many homeless people reported no offer of services at all, especially those who moved before the abatement notice period ended. Aside from the navigation center beds, there were 150 Pier 80 beds; about half of what was needed for the 300 people previously camped there.

On Wednesday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, further sweeps took place in the morning displacing the surrounding encampments.

On the night of Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Pier 80 was expanded to 180 beds. Access is still limited to HOT team referral, leaving the 700 shelter seekers on the wait list out in the cold during rains expected tonight.

We, at the Coalition On Homelessness have repeatedly demanded that the City utilize the federal encampment recommendations developed by the U.S. Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness. As stated by the report:

"To end homelessness for everyone, we must link people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including people sleeping and living in encampments, with permanent housing opportunities matched with the right level of services to ensure that those housing opportunities are stable and successful."

These recommendations can be found here: <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/ending-homelessness-for-people-in-encampments/>.

We recommend that San Francisco adopt its own "best practices", which could be modeled after new ordinance passed by Indianapolis, Indiana that requires transitional or permanent housing be provided to homeless camp residents before evictions can take place. Our policy could also be modeled after the King Street Encampment relocation into permanent housing back in 2012.

These are steps the City could have, and should have, taken to respond to Division:

- Step 1: Dialogue and conduct needs assessment with destitute tent campers along Division
- Step 2; Ensure portable bathrooms, garbage service and sharps containers while plan is being developed and finalized
- Step 3: Create a plan; secure new resources that don't siphon existing overwhelmed homeless services. Secure temporary shelter, and permanent housing for exit out of temporary quarters.
- Step 4: Share draft plan with advocates and collaborative organizations and ensure input on draft plan from members of the encampment, ensure plan meets actual needs.
- Step 5: Share final plan with campers, including clear timelines and transparency.
- Step 6: Carry out relocation plan with careful consideration for existing relationships, pets, belongings, and embracing self-determination.