

February 14, 2021

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Re: Crime in Hayes Valley

Dear City Leaders:

The membership of the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (HVNA) includes the residents and merchants of the lively, diverse, feisty Hayes Valley neighborhood at the heart of our city. We're writing because the dramatic rise in crime in our neighborhood has made it increasingly difficult to live, work, and do business safely. It's untenable and unacceptable, and it's happening on your watch. We need your urgent attention to fix it.

Here's a partial list of crimes that occurred in or near Hayes Valley in just the first eight days of February:

February 2	Gunshots were fired into an inhabited building on the 700 block of McAllister St.
February 3	B8ta employees on Hayes St. were threatened with a gun during a daylight armed robbery, forcing the store to close indefinitely due to life-threatening safety concerns.
February 5	Bank robbery on the 500 block of Van Ness.
February 6	Cali-Kites store at Octavia and Ivy was robbed at gunpoint.
February 8	Shots were fired into a car that crashed into the Mint after a chase through Hayes Valley.

These are just the crimes that made the news. We see more criminal attacks daily on our neighborhood's businesses, residents, and homes. Our homes are repeatedly broken into and robbed. Our merchants suffer unsustainable losses from theft and smashed windows. Employees are threatened with guns. Residents are robbed at gunpoint on our own streets. The sound of gunshots is no longer unusual. What sets these crimes apart is not just that they're increasingly common and serious, but also that they're more brazen.¹

Fair or not, there's a perception in San Francisco—among both residents and criminals—that armed property crime can be committed with impunity. There's a strong belief that if you commit a crime, even in broad daylight, no one, not even a cop, will stop you; that even if the crime is reported, the police will be too busy to investigate it and arrest you; that even if you're arrested, you won't be charged; that even if you're charged, you won't be prosecuted; and—new to our COVID era—that even if you're arrested and charged, you won't be held and will promptly be set free to commit more crimes. With each day that passes without action, the perception is reinforced, and the cycle accelerates.

We understand that these problems started before any of you were in your current roles. But when we ask you for answers about why things have gotten so bad on your watch and what will be done to fix it, all we

get in response is finger-pointing from one agency to another, and from one elected official to another. The police blame underfunding and understaffing. They also blame the DA for not prosecuting the criminals they catch, forcing them to waste manpower arresting the same people over and over again for the same crimes. The DA's office blames the police for not bringing it cases that can be successfully prosecuted. It also blames the judges for releasing the accused awaiting trial to reduce prison occupancy due to COVID. Judges blame the public health order for requiring them to release the accused. And everyone blames the rise in property crime on COVID and its economic toll.

To be clear, we're not expressing opinions on any of your individual political ideas on public safety or criminal justice. Hayes Valley is a very diverse neighborhood, and our membership likely represents every possible combination of support for and opposition to your various ideas. But as the leaders of the city's public safety and criminal justice infrastructure, you are judged not on your individual political ideas, but on your collective actions and results. When it comes to keeping us safe, you all succeed together or fail together. And right now there's no question that all of you are collectively failing all of us—the residents of San Francisco who elected you, who employ you, and to whom you took an oath.

We need all of you to stop the finger-pointing and work together to fix this. What will you do to change the perception that crimes can be committed here with impunity? To make it safe for our businesses to operate? To make it safe for us to walk on our own streets, to keep our belongings in our own homes, to actually receive our mail and packages, and to go to sleep at night in our beds? Are there health policy changes you can make to keep dangerous people off the streets while awaiting arraignment and trial?

We don't need—and won't accept—responses that crime is down “overall,” solemn acknowledgements that you “need to do better,” or hollow promises that you'll work on it at some time in the future. We need a plan that you can and will execute immediately. We are therefore giving you a deadline of 5 pm this Thursday, February 18 to deliver to us a detailed joint plan to make Hayes Valley safe. We understand that this will probably strike you as an impertinent demand with a comically unrealistic deadline. But we're quite serious. Our neighborhood can't wait another day. And frankly you all should have developed this plan already.

And if making Hayes Valley safe on this timeline is beyond your collective abilities, please be straight with us and let us know that too, so that we can evaluate our next steps.

Thanks for reading. We look forward to hearing from all of you on or before 5 pm on Thursday.

Sincerely,



Craig Hamburg
HVNA President



Jennifer Laska
HVNA Vice President



Bob Barnwell
Chair, HVNA Public Safety Committee



Lloyd Silverstein
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¹ We recognize, of course, that these problems exist throughout our city. During this same eight-day period: On February 1, Jack Palladino died after a brutal attack on the street in front of his home. On February 4, a 26-year old was killed while jogging by a man out on probation, driving drunk, and speeding in a stolen vehicle. On February 5, two real estate photographers were robbed—their car window smashed and camera equipment stolen—while they were still driving the car. Then, in an *Onion*-esque turn, the news crew covering the incident was robbed of *its* equipment. On February 6, two children were abducted during a carjacking. These citywide problems are equally untenable and unacceptable. You should address them with the same speed and vigor as the problems in Hayes Valley. But that doesn't mean the fixes can take longer. It just means you need to work harder and faster.