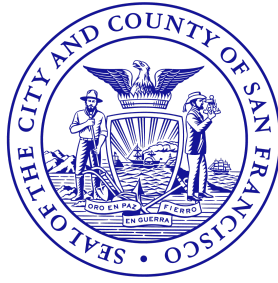


City and County
of San Francisco



Board of Supervisors
Member, District 6

MATT DORSEY

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NEWS RELEASE

Dorsey seeks mass-arrest, detox and treatment plan for burgeoning drug scenes on Sixth Street

Pilot program is needed to ‘get drug-related offenders off the streets — and optimally into drug treatment — rather than simply moved to different streets’

SAN FRANCISCO (Jan. 3, 2025) — Supervisor Matt Dorsey today requested that city agencies responsible for public safety and health functions report to the Board of Supervisors early in the new year on what would be required to mount a multi-departmental enforcement plan to maximize the use of arrests and compulsory detox and treatment to solve drug-related lawlessness along the Sixth Street corridor and elsewhere in downtown San Francisco.

Based on recent reports by residents and local merchants calling Sixth Street’s drug-driven disorder “[worse than ever](#),” and SFPD’s own estimate that “at least 200 people loiter and use drugs on the roughly quarter-mile stretch each night,” Dorsey is asking relevant agencies to outline a plan for a one-year pilot to effect no fewer than 100 arrests per night. The plan’s intent, according to Dorsey’s formal [Letter of Inquiry](#) released today, would be “to hold one half of those estimated to be engaging in drug-related lawlessness criminally accountable.”

“As we begin the new year, new approaches are urgently needed to restore order to our streets, to diminish San Francisco’s attraction as a destination city for drug use and drug dealing, and to make lifesaving interventions in behavior that’s deadlier and more costly than ever before,” said Dorsey, who has acknowledged his own journey in [recovery from drug](#)

[addiction](#) as a decisive factor in pursuing his role of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. “I know I’m not alone among recovery community members in believing strongly in the life-changing possibilities of recovery and drug treatment — including court-mandated treatment. Like many other San Franciscans, in long-term recovery and otherwise, I think it’s past time for our City to move boldly beyond practices that have amounted to drug enablist and neglectful cruelty. I’m very encouraged by Mayor-Elect Daniel Lurie’s emphasis on the need for lasting solutions, and not just shifting the problem elsewhere. My Letter of Inquiry today seeks responses from relevant agencies that will help make the Board of Supervisors a full and active partner in fulfilling Mayor Lurie’s vision for enduring solutions that will end the phenomenon of public drug use in San Francisco and help save lives.”

Dorsey’s inquiry specifically asks for an approach to “get drug-related offenders off the streets — and optimally into drug treatment — rather than simply moved to different streets.” Dorsey also announced that he will call for hearings early in the new year on needed resources to implement a coordinated plan for large-scale arrests and involuntary holds for drug-related lawlessness. The Board’s Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee is already slated to hear [a resolution Dorsey authored](#) urging full implementation of Proposition 36, which voters overwhelmingly supported in November. Prop 36 created a new criminal offense called Treatment-Mandated Felonies for repeat misdemeanor drug possession offenders, which will strengthen the role of drug courts to provide drug offenders alternatives to jail.

Letters of Inquiry formally reflect the Board of Supervisors’ power of inquiry and review under San Francisco City Charter § 16.114, and are customarily facilitated by the Board Clerk’s office. Departments asked to report to Supervisor Dorsey’s office within 30 days include the San Francisco Police Department, Sheriff’s Office, Fire Department EMS Division, Department of Public Health, District Attorney’s Office and City Attorney’s Office.

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For immediate release: Jan. 3, 2025

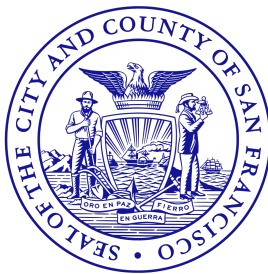
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January 3, 2025

Ms. Angela Cavillo, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
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San Francisco, Calif. 94102-4689

Emailed to: Angela.Cavillo@sfgov.org

Letter of Inquiry: Maximizing the use of arrests and involuntary holds for drug-related lawlessness to end open-air drug scenes on the Sixth Street corridor

Dear Madam Clerk,

In accordance with the power of inquiry and review that City Charter § 16.114 vests in the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, I write this Letter of Inquiry (LOI) to seek departmental feedback on a coordinated strategy to maximize the use of large-scale arrests and involuntary holds for drug-related lawlessness on the Sixth Street corridor of my district. I request responses, as described herein, within 30 days from the following relevant agencies:

- San Francisco Police Department;
- San Francisco Sheriff's Office;
- San Francisco Fire Department EMS Division;
- San Francisco Department of Public Health; and
- San Francisco District Attorney's Office.

To the extent my request involves strategies that pose possible litigation risks, I acknowledge that City Attorney guidance I'll also seek will be subject to attorney-client confidentiality.

Background

In recent years, the historically unprecedented proliferation of potentially addictive synthetic street drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine has driven a public health calamity the lethality¹ of which has far surpassed COVID-19² and ranks second only to the deadliest years of the AIDS crisis³ in San Francisco history.

Yet beyond harms that are readily measurable in human mortality, there is, too, a multitude of less measurable but increasingly costly harms that the myriad externalities of untreated drug addiction now inflict on our city, our economy, and our neighborhoods. In September, I requested that the Board of Supervisors' Budget and Legislative Analyst's Office formally account for total costs that untreated drug addiction impose on San Francisco's taxpayers.⁴ And while that financial analysis remains underway, methodologies employed by similar studies suggest that even the most conservative extrapolation would put San Francisco's untreated-addiction-driven costs far in excess of \$1 billion annually.

Among instances of drug-driven public disorder that have been plaguing San Francisco neighborhoods since before the advent of COVID-19, few have been worse — in my own observation as well as that of many constituents I represent — than the Sixth Street corridor in my district currently. Indeed, a recent news report by the *San Francisco Chronicle*⁵ quoted one local business owner who said, "I've been here for 14 years, and I've never seen it this bad."

¹ Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, OCME Accidental Overdose Reports, <https://www.sf.gov/resource/2020/ocme-accidental-overdose-reports>.

² San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH), COVID-19 deaths, <https://www.sf.gov/data/covid-19-cases-and-deaths>.

³ SFPDH, HIV Semi-Annual Surveillance Report, HIV Cases Diagnosed Through December 2022 and Reported Through February 2023, https://www.sf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/HIV_Epi_Semi-Annual%20Report_Dec%202022.pdf.

⁴ "Cost analysis request on untreated drug addiction suggests S.F. taxpayers' tab could exceed \$1billion; Supervisor Dorsey asks Board's Budget Analyst to replicate Columbia University's 'Shoveling Up' methodology to highlight need to reign in costly drug-driven harms," Supervisor Matt Dorsey News Release and BLA request, Sept.18,2024, <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:1abd2763-900a-4f02-a99f-b08356795e92>.

⁵ "Homelessness, drug use on S.F.'s Sixth Street worse than ever, merchants say" by Maliya Ellis, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 11, 2024, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/drug-use-homelessness-s-f-s-sixth-street-19974894.php>.

That business owner's perspective was largely shared by other attendees of the community safety meeting I attended last month, when police department representatives also in attendance acknowledged that displacements from police enforcement actions in adjacent areas were driving the significantly deteriorated safety and street conditions on and near the Sixth Street corridor over the last several months. According to the *Chronicle's* report, SFPD's Acting Captain Daniel Manning, of Tenderloin Station, noted that "at least 200 people loiter and use drugs on the roughly quarter-mile stretch each night."

Framework for Departmental Responses to this LOI

My LOI seeks responses on what would be necessary to implement a multi-departmental enforcement strategy that aims, ambitiously yet modestly, to hold one half of those estimated to be engaging in drug-related lawlessness criminally accountable — i.e., to effect no less than 100 arrests per night for offenses related to public drug use, intoxication and/or possession.

For purposes of responding to this inquiry, I ask that this hypothetical strategy be approached as a one-year pilot centered on, but not limited to, the Sixth Street corridor. Importantly, the enforcement approach I ask responding agencies to consider should *not* be viewed as a continuation of existing strategies focused on disbursing and displacing offenders. I seek responses on what resources would be necessary to get drug-related offenders *off* the streets — and optimally into drug treatment — rather than simply moved to *different* streets.

The guiding principles I recommend for any such approach are mirrored in a proposed resolution I authored, which is pending action in the Board of Supervisors' Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee, urging prompt implementation of Proposition 36, the "Drug Addiction and Theft Reduction Act," to prioritize ending open-air drug scenes citywide, especially in vulnerable neighborhoods identified as Equity Priority Communities.

- **Emphasizing equity.** That equity govern our prioritization of enforcement efforts, acknowledging the disproportionate harms open-air drug scenes inflict on socio-economically marginalized communities;
- **Saving lives.** That criminal justice interventions for drug possession and public drug use be approached as life-saving inventions, ensuring access to appropriate medication and drug treatment options;

- **Limiting criminal justice impacts.** That expungement of all charges for drug possession or public drug use should be a guaranteed condition for successfully completing any court-mandated drug treatment program; and
- **Destigmatizing addiction.** That efforts to mitigate addiction-driven lawlessness affirm the human dignity of those with Substance-Use Disorders, destigmatizing drug addiction, while unequivocally denormalizing public drug use and deadly behavior.⁶

Conclusion

Public drug use has long been illegal in California, and San Franciscans are not unreasonable in expecting to see those laws fully enforced.

I am aware of legal provisions that have been utilized to varying degrees in recent years to hold some individuals accountable for drug-related lawlessness and nuisance conduct. However, apart from violations of California Health and Safety Code §11550, which prohibits anyone from being under the influence of a controlled substance (excluding marijuana) in any setting, I am optimistic that more recently enacted laws like California's SB 43 (used to compel individuals into drug treatment under certain circumstances) and Proposition 36 (which creates Treatment-Mandated Felonies, or TMFs, for repeated misdemeanor drug possession offenses) offer new hope for much-needed progress.

As someone in recovery from drug addiction myself, I know I'm not alone among recovery community members in believing strongly in the life-changing possibilities of drug treatment — including court-mandated treatment — and long-term recovery. Like many others, in recovery and otherwise, I believe it is past time for San Francisco to move boldly beyond its civic practice of drug enablist and neglectful cruelty. New approaches are needed to restore order to our streets; to diminish the attraction San Francisco now holds as a destination city for drug use and drug dealing; and to make consequential and lifesaving interventions in drug-related behavior that is deadlier and more costly than ever before in human history.

⁶ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Resolution File No. 241177, "Urging Implementation of Proposition 36 - The Drug Addiction and Theft Reduction Act - Prioritize Ending Open-Air Drug Scenes in Equity Priority Communities," introduced by Supervisor Dorsey, Dec. 3, 2024, pending committee action in the Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee, <https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=13602594&GUID=E4D06FAC-B110-4E78-8E4C-3291AA420892>.

Supervisor Dorsey LOI: Maximizing the use of arrests and involuntary holds for drug-related lawlessness to end open-air drug scenes on the Sixth Street corridor

Page 5 of 6

I am moreover encouraged by the public safety priorities identified by Mayor-Elect Daniel Lurie, whose recent assessment of Sixth Street open-air drug scenes emphasized the need for “lasting solutions, not just shifting the problem elsewhere.”⁷

My LOI seeks responses from relevant agencies that will make the San Francisco Board of Supervisors a full and active partner in fulfilling Mayor-Elect Lurie’s vision for enduring solutions that will once and for all end the phenomenon of public drug use in San Francisco and save lives. It is moreover my intention to hold hearings in the new year on needed resources to implement a coordinated strategy that maximizes large-scale arrests and involuntary holds for drug-related lawlessness on the Sixth Street corridor and elsewhere.

As always, Madam Clerk, thank you for facilitating this LOI. Please know I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you or designated members of your staff may have, or to engage with representatives of departments directly. If I am unavailable, you may contact my incoming Chief of Staff, Dominica Donovan, at Dominica.Donovan@sfgov.org.

Thank you!

Sincerely,



MATT DORSEY

⁷ Lurie, D. [@DanielLurie], posted Dec. 16, 2024 at 10:18 a.m.: “Tackling the crisis on our streets is a top priority. On Sunday, I returned to 6th and Mission with SFPD to better understand the situation. We must focus on lasting solutions, not just shifting the problem elsewhere. My administration is ready to get to work on day 1.” X (formerly Twitter), <https://x.com/DanielLurie/status/1868722483286917622>.

Supervisor Dorsey LOI: Maximizing the use of arrests and involuntary holds for drug-related lawlessness to end open-air drug scenes on the Sixth Street corridor
Page 6 of 6

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