

May 26, 2022

To: City of San José MGPTF
Attn: Paul Pereira
200 East Santa Clara Street
San José, California 95113
Email: paul.pereira@sanjoseca.gov

Re: MGPTF Policy Team Agenda 5.26.22 - Item D. *Reject* New Name

Dear Policy Team of the Mayor's Gang Task Force,

We write to urge you to reject Item D: Discuss and approve new name.

This name change discussion reflects a non-response to the concerns the community raised back in [2019](#) regarding the dangerous overlap between SJPd and community-based youth services. At that time, community-based youth organizations, families and police-impacted youth spoke out against the Chief of Police's questionable presentation about a rise in youth violence and the way that much-needed youth services were closely tied to law enforcement. The community argued that this association between policing and youth services and viewing youth as gang members effectively criminalizes youth of color, particularly those who live in San Jose's "gang hotspots" in Districts 3, 5, and 7. Ultimately, we feel that in order to truly give youth the services they need, law enforcement would have to be removed entirely.

Three years, a global pandemic, and a national reckoning of police brutality later, the only changes the MGPTF are looking at are nominal rather than substantive. It is clear from this agenda item that the Policy Team is trying to signal through a name change of the MGPTF that substantive changes have been made when in reality, there have been no changes made. This demonstrates a false image to the public that the MGPTF is more responsive to community calls for change than reality shows.

Not only a non-response to the substantive changes the community has long pushed for, changing the name is insidious and potentially dangerous because it changes face without changing anything else: policy structure, who controls sources or destinations of funding, or the centrality of SJPd in all aspects of the work. Further, a name change functions to further obscure the day-to-day operations of the MGPTF, benefitting from obscurity to trick and confuse the community, community based organizations and youth about what the task force actually does.

We know that the MGPTF was established in 1991 as a continuation of the draconian Project Crackdown. The task force was created by then-Mayor Susan Hammer with two goals: 1) to

prevent young people from joining gangs and 2) increase the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in controlling criminal behavior by gangs. While the language that frames the MGPTF has morphed and changed over the years, these core functions, which are, putting it another way, to surveil, police, and criminalize young people of color, haven't changed one bit. A name change is the icing of the cake— it would nominally distance the MGPTF from the much more overt racialized and violent and draconian framing it was associated with in the beginning days. But it wouldn't change the actual practices of the task force from its inception. Instead, because of advances in surveillance technologies, the criminalization and invasion into the lives of young people who live in police-impacted neighborhoods has gotten much worse.

We want young people to live out their childhoods free from incarceration, systemic racism, being targeted as gang members and police violence. Our youth are deserving of many of the services that function both inside and out of the MGPTF without an expectation of collaboration with law enforcement. Ultimately, we want to see law enforcement to be separated, with all resources going directly towards youth services. In a post-George Floyd and Breonna Taylor era, how can we advocate for law enforcement to be removed as school resource officers while still have the Chief of Police as co-chair, District Attorneys as a part of the policy team who have subpoenaed youth service files as evidence of gang membership, and police officers presenting climate reports?

It is senseless to change the name of the MGPTF without making the substantive changes the community has long been calling for. We urge you to reject this proposed name change and instead move towards substantive change.

Respectfully,

Jose Valle
Silicon Valley De-Bug

Leila Ullmann

Jesilyn Faust
Hero Tent

Organizations:

San Jose State University Human Rights Institute
Showing Up for Racial Justice at Sacred Heart
San Jose State University Students Against Mass Incarceration

Individuals:

Dr. William Armaline, San Jose State University Human Rights Institute

Tina Brown

Leslie Zeiger,

Solomon Bowen

Nathaniel Cotton

Jaiden Cotton

Karen Matsueda

Roni Zeiger

Najman Mahbouba