

San Jose Downtown Association
28 N. First Street, Suite 1000
San Jose, CA 95113



sjdowntown.com
408.279.1775

January 11, 2022

Board of Supervisors
70 West Hedding Street
East Wing, 10th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110

RE: [Item 12](#): Declaring mental health and substance abuse a public health crisis in Santa Clara County

Dear Honorable Supervisors,

The San Jose Downtown Association, and the more than 1800 business and property owners we represent, agree there is a mental health and substance abuse crisis in Santa Clara County. We see it everyday in downtown San Jose with individuals suffering from psychosis and addiction in our doorways, sidewalks, parks, creeks and trails. And their numbers continue to grow.

One of the main objectives we see in the Board declaring a public health crisis is to elevate legislation on the state level, where leadership on mental health has been sorely lacking. Decades ago, the state abdicated its responsibility for its most vulnerable citizens by turning over mental health services to counties without the dedicated funds for implementation. Our cities have suffered ever since.

California's cities and counties are clearly struggling to care for the thousands of individuals deteriorating on our streets. It's easy to agree with recommendations that call for better coordination and partnerships, but let's not sugarcoat what this "declaration" is really about: the current system is failing, and, as Supervisor Ellenberg's memo understates, we need "tangible improvements in the system as a whole."

Declaring a public health crisis is a bold step forward only if it leads to the massive changes hinted at in the proposal. Nibbling at incremental improvements to the status quo efforts will not cut it.

We appreciate the work of the Supervisors and county staff on these critical issues and we stand ready to partnering and implementing "a new system" together that truly addresses this public health crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Scott Knies'.

Scott Knies
Executive Director