

CARE FIRST SOUTH PASADENA



For Immediate Release
10-5-20
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Community Coalition Calls for Fully Investigating any Improper Ties Between South Pasadena Police & Religious & Political Groups

Amid growing national concern about connections between local police departments and religious and right wing extremist groups, the Care First South Pasadena coalition is insisting that the South Pasadena City Council fully investigate potential local links based on a recent plan with an anti-LGBTQ religious group to hold a prayer vigil at City Hall with uninformed, on-duty police officers.

“We demand that the City Council dig deep into activities of the police department to identify any use of city resources and time on the clock involving communication with religious or political organizations in violation of city and state policies and laws,” said Helen Tran, a member of the Care First South Pasadena coalition. “Planning to hold such an event at City Hall at taxpayer expense contradicts the long-standing separation of church and state in the U.S. and may be a violation of city policy and state laws.”

Residents, those who work, shop, or visit in South Pasadena, and even those who drive through town have reason to be concerned, added Tran. They can support fair and unbiased policing by signing Care First South Pasadena’s [petition here](#).

The prayer service plan was announced by local Police Chief Joe Ortiz in an e-mail to officers and some community residents and city commissioners mid-afternoon on Sept. 24 using a city e-mail server (see copy below). In the e-mail, dubbed an “Invitation to all,” Ortiz asked those in attendance to “please refrain from using photos of our personnel as we welcome the community’s spiritual support.”

The prayer service was slated for the police station at the City Hall complex on Saturday, Sept. 26, at 10 a.m. Once word of the planned event with the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property circulated within the community, the chief announced in a subsequent e-mail later that afternoon the event had been “postponed” until a later date. Ortiz subsequently issued a statement apologizing to the community for what he called his “lack of due diligence in this matter.”

The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property, is a self-described Catholic organization the South Poverty Law Center has labeled as “virulently anti-LGBT.” It has used xenophobic language, referring the COVID-19 pandemic as the “Chinese virus,” and its [website](#) contains [articles](#) denouncing Black Lives Matter protests.

The prayer event plan, and potentially other improper activities using city resources, comes after the Brennan Center for Justice warned in [a report](#) in late August that “law enforcement officials with alleged connections to white supremacist groups or far-right militant activities have been exposed” in numerous states, including California.

The planned event also comes after continuous protests since May by South Pasadena Youth for Police Reform and Black Lives Matter South Pasadena here in town, along with others calling for police reform and justice for the Black lives lost to police brutality. The Anti-Racism Committee of South Pasadena held

a listening session with the police department and the City Council to share their personal experiences of biased and unequal treatment by police officers. Care First South Pasadena has called for our city leaders to critically examine the police budget. These public demands for police reform are occurring front and center in our city and in cities throughout our country.

“The City Council must make sure that the police force protects and serves all South Pasadenans irrespective of race, class, or sexual orientation,” said London Lang, a coalition member. “Only a thorough investigation can assure that happens.”

Aliza Rood, another coalition member, added that “while our views may differ on the specifics of police reform, we share one vision: a community that respects the dignity and safety of all people. And when we dissent, we do so respectfully—not with hate.”

The Care First South Pasadena coalition, along with a growing list of organizations and individuals, has joined in the call for an immediate investigation with the results fully disclosed to the community.

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E-Mail:

Sent: Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 2:55 PM
From: "Joe Ortiz" <jortiz@southpasadenaca.gov>
To: No recipient address
Subject: Invitation to all

To all-

Please join us this Saturday, September 26, 2020, at 10:00 am (in the front courtyard of the station) for gratitude as residents offer their spiritual support. A local chapter of the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Prosperity would like to offer prayers and blessings for the men and women of the Police and Fire Department. This event is an excellent opportunity to meet with some of our community members who want to show their support and publicly recognize all first responders and the excellent work we do.

As a friendly reminder, please know that our uniformed personnel are not in attendance to endorse, support, oppose or contradict any political campaign, initiative, social issue, cause, or religion. Please refrain from using photos of our personnel as we welcome the community's, spiritual support.

Anyone is welcome to attend, and please remember to wear a mask and socially distance yourself as needed.

Thanks,
Joe Ortiz, Chief of Police
South Pasadena Police Department ●
1422 Mission Street ● South Pasadena, CA 91030 ● (626) 403-7272

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