

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Maxine Doogan 415-265-3302

### **Sex Workers Condemn MacArthur Park Crackdown**

*Criminalizing Public Health is Failed Strategy; Veto of SB 57 Root of Current Crisis*

**LOS ANGELES, CA (May 26, 2026)** — The Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) and other sex worker activist groups condemn "Operation Free MacArthur Park," a multi-agency law enforcement action that resulted in 21 arrests and the seizure of 19 kilos of fentanyl.

We condemn the dangerous narrative that public health programs are responsible for the neighborhood's challenges. Some business owners, have called for an end to needle distribution and Narcan programs, claiming they "attract" drug use. But instead, advocates argue that the current state of the park is a direct result of the state's failure to implement a comprehensive overdose prevention infrastructure.

**The Veto that Stalled Progress:** Advocates say that the current crisis in MacArthur Park could have been avoided if California had adopted more progressive health policies years ago. For example, **in August 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed SB 57**, a bill that would have authorized pilot programs for safe consumption sites (also known as Overdose Prevention Centers) in San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles.

"If SB 57 had been signed into law in 2022, we wouldn't be here right now," said Maxine Doogan of ESPLERP. "By vetoing that bill, the Governor denied cities the tools to provide an off street location with clinical supervision. The 'used syringes' residents see in the park today are a symptom of a system that provides the tools for safety that reduces HIV transmission but denies the option for supervised space to use them safely and dispose of them properly."

There is ample research to show that safe consumption sites (SSP) are effective.

- Research from existing legal sites in New York City and internationally shows that Overdose Prevention Centers (the goal of SB 57) reduce public drug use and discarded litter in the surrounding areas.
- According to the CDC, Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) are associated with a **50% reduction in HIV and Hepatitis C incidence**. Claims that these programs "serve no purpose" are contradicted by decades of peer-reviewed data.
- **Pathways to Recovery:** Research consistently proves that SSP participants are **five times more likely** to enter drug treatment and three times more likely to stop using drugs altogether than those who don't access these programs.

ESPLERP acknowledges the frustrations but blaming health services for organized crime is a logical fallacy.

"Removing safe supplies will not stop the drug use," said Maxine Doogan of ESPLERP. "It will only ensure that when the next overdose happens — there will be no one there with the tools to save a life."

ESPLERP calls on Mayor Karen Bass and the City Council to reject the call to dismantle these programs and instead advocate for the state-level policy changes that were blocked in 2022. The solution is more integration and expansion of services, not the abandonment of public health.

**###**

