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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Grand Jury Indicts 51 Defendants for Operating East Village Open-Air Drug Market Under Control of a Criminal Street Gang**

### ***Grand Jury Hands Down 308 Counts After Three Weeks of Testimony***

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that 51 defendants have been indicted by a grand jury for their roles in selling cocaine base at an open-air drug market in East Village, an area that over a two-year period received 56,000 calls for police service.

After three-and-a-half-weeks of presenting evidence, the grand jury returned indictments on April 24, against 51 defendants on hundreds of felony drug sales charges, drug manufacturing, weapons offenses, child abuse, resisting arrest, and gang allegations. Twenty-seven defendants were arrested during a day-long sweep involving over 100 officers on April 23. The defendants were arraigned in San Diego Superior Court on Wednesday and Thursday of this week. Based on the charges and their criminal records, the defendants are facing prison sentences between one year and life in prison.

“I refuse to allow San Diego streets to turn into open-air drug markets controlled by gangs like you see in other areas of the country,” **DA Summer Stephan** said. “Our streets and neighborhoods belong to the community and not to criminal organizations that line their pockets from the sale of addictive drugs that result in rampant overdoses and incubate violence and destruction. When a criminal street gang controls an entire neighborhood and specifically a known intersection, every person who drives, walks, does business or runs errands in the area is victimized.”

The calls for service in the East Village area near 16<sup>th</sup> and K Streets kicked off a large-scale investigation by the San Diego Police Department and the District Attorney’s Gang Unit. Deputy District Attorney Miriam Hemming and Deputy District Attorney Michelle Sellwood worked relentlessly with SDPD and the DEA’s Narcotics Task Force to identify the defendants and convene a grand jury. The one-year operation consisted of undercover officers purchasing drugs directly from dealers, surveillance, and the execution of multiple search warrants.

“The San Diego Police Department is constantly monitoring areas that may become hot spots for crime,” said **San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit**. “Calls for service and resident complaints in

this area showed that something had to be done. This operation represents more than a year of dedicated work by investigators and prosecutors to disrupt the history of drugs and violence that plagued the East Village community. We are grateful to all of our partners for their help in holding these criminals accountable and will keep a close watch on this area to maintain the great progress we've made.”

It became clear during the operation that the impetus behind the success of this particular drug market was that it was largely operated and directed by gang members working in concert to benefit from rampant illegal drug sales at all times of day or night. After officers would arrive to arrest suspects on smaller scale offenses to curb the rising crime, the illegal activity would resume as soon as police left the area. In addition, officers discovered that gang members were conducting countersurveillance on law enforcement.

Over a two-year period from April 2021 through April 2023, there were nearly 56,000 calls for service to the San Diego Police Department, of which 6,187 were for violent acts. In addition, there were at least 6,500 arrests in the gang-controlled East Village open air-drug market.

In addition to the 51 indictments, 42 additional defendants have been charged with drug, gun, and violence cases, 16 of which included gang allegations. Law enforcement recovered a significant amount of contraband, including over 30 firearms, 3 pounds of cocaine base, nearly 8 pounds of cocaine powder, 350 grams of methamphetamine, 726 fentanyl pills, and over \$79,000 in cash.

The dangers of this open-air drug market were so grave that there were over 1,000 overdose calls to police, multiple shootings, stabbings and assaults. Two of the intended indictees were shot and one of them was killed.

“This indictment is a testament to the cooperation and coordination of our law enforcement partners at SDPD and the Narcotics Task Force, working closely with our Gangs Division, that these defendants were identified and will now face justice,” Stephan said.

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***About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office***

*The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.*