



San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott

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City Attorney's S.M.A.R.T. House Approved

Innovative Program Helps Substance Abusers Get off the Street and on a Path to Success

The San Diego City Council today gave the go-ahead for an 84-bed facility that will provide help for people whose substance abuse problems have led them to live on the streets.

The S.M.A.R.T. (San Diego Misdemeanor At-Risk Track) House will create a safe, drug-free environment where people with substance abuse problems can get their lives back on track. It will operate from a rehabilitated Super 8 motel that the City purchased this summer. The motel, which has a history of low occupancy and a high rate crime, will be refurbished with new landscaping, lighting, and gating, and operate with round-the-clock staffing and security.

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott, whose office launched the S.M.A.R.T. Program last year, said the innovative program provides its participants with tailored drug treatment programs, counseling, bridge housing, case management, and wrap-around services that allow them to succeed on their own once they graduate.

“The S.M.A.R.T. Program fills a critical void in our region’s approach to homelessness by helping our most vulnerable citizens get off the streets,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“Graduates say that the program turned their lives around, giving them the tools and confidence they needed to succeed. With this program expansion, hundreds more can follow in their footsteps.”**

The City Council voted 8-1 to approve funding and a Conditional Use Permit that will allow the City to rehabilitate the motel and open it to participants. In addition, the City Attorney’s Office is forming a Neighborhood Advisory Committee to seek regular feedback about facility operations from members of the Otay Mesa and Nestor communities.

Expansion will allow the program to serve approximately 70 people under one roof. Current capacity is 10, and some 90 referrals have been rejected due to limited space.

Mayor Kevin Faulconer praised the S.M.A.R.T Program as a key part of the City’s response to homelessness.

“By developing a diversion for people in and out of the criminal justice system, we’re giving repeat low-level offenders the opportunity to turn their lives around in a stable, supportive environment rather than end up homeless or in a jail cell,” Mayor Faulconer said. **“This is all about investing in a person’s future on the front end rather than spending significant public resources as that individual continuously cycles through the criminal justice system.”**

Participation in S.M.A.R.T. is voluntary, and referrals are carefully screened. The program prioritizes chronic offenders with acute drug addictions and complex social service needs.

In June, the program's expansion was awarded \$3 million in state "Proposition 47" funds, which are earmarked for local drug-treatment programs that help low-level offenders. San Diego's application ranked first in California, ahead of 57 other proposals, primarily due to the program's ability to divert people from the court system into a comprehensive treatment and housing program that addresses their underlying needs.

The S.M.A.R.T. House was presented at 19 community meetings this year, including a Town Hall hosted by the City Attorney's Office.

The S.M.A.R.T. Program is a collaboration between the San Diego City Attorney's Office, the San Diego Police Department, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, the San Diego County Office of the Public Defender, the County of San Diego Behavioral Health Services Department, and Family Health Centers of San Diego, with support and assistance from Mayor Kevin Faulconer, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Chief Deputy City Attorney Lara Easton spearheaded the effort. The San Diego County District Attorney's Office is now working on a similar program with regional impact.

The S.M.A.R.T. Program is led by Chief Deputy City Attorney Lara Easton, who leads the Neighborhood Justice & Collaborative Courts Unit in the Criminal Division of the City Attorney's Office.

(Attached is a "Myth vs. Fact" sheet that refutes misrepresentations of the S.M.A.R.T. House project.)

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