

Father Joe's Villages responds to Voice of San Diego article

On August 2, 2023, the Voice of San Diego published an article that regarded four Notices to Cure received by Father Joe's Villages from the San Diego Housing Commission in early 2023. Among concerns raised by the San Diego Housing Commission were specific claims regarding the number of Black clients who were included on the organization's long-term/short-term debarment lists and allegations of employee misconduct towards clients.

The following is a statement from Deacon Jim Vargas, president and CEO at Father Joe's Villages:

"Father Joe's Villages (FJV) is committed to working with our community partners to better serve our neighbors experiencing homelessness. We welcome any feedback that helps FJV accomplish that goal.

Over the past several months, we have undertaken a number of significant steps to address concerns and requests from the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC), steps that include how we address and communicate about administrative concerns and our suspension/debarment policies. **As of July 2023, all conditions of the Notices to Cure and Notice of Concern Father Joe's Villages have received this year have been met or are actively being addressed.** We recognize such Notices to Cure and Notices of Concern as valuable opportunities for our organization and for the San Diego Housing Commission to identify how we can not only better work together but, ultimately, better serve our neighbors in need. We are disappointed that the Voice of San Diego article mischaracterized our relationship with the San Diego Housing Commission and our commitment to addressing the important issues raised by the Notices.

Since the SDHC does not fully fund all programs that it contracts to Father Joe's Villages, Father Joe's Villages will continue to philanthropically contribute to City funded projects to make sure San Diegans experiencing homelessness receive the care they desperately deserve."

On Debarments at Father Joe's Villages:

"One important element of these notices to Cure centers around Father Joe's Villages' suspension and debarment list. This list, named the "DNR List" by the SDHC, precludes clients from returning to service at FJV and is not a decision we take lightly. Acts of serious security concern like physical battery, sexual assault, attempts at kidnapping, arson, drug sales and threats of serious violence or mass murder have qualified a person for the suspension and debarment list. FJV serves families, children, and other vulnerable populations and we have a duty to protect

the safety and welfare of both the clients and staff. That responsibility is paramount. Therefore, those who commit such acts are placed on a “do not return” list for a temporary or indefinite period of time, depending on the circumstance.

Upon evaluation of the list by the SDHC it has been discovered that our list may disproportionately impact individuals who identify as Black. Although the suspension and debarment list is based purely on objective actions at the time of the incident, such as physical assault or threats with weapons, we seek to better understand why this disparity exists. Over these past few months, in partnership with the SDHC and Equity in Action, we have begun implementing various policies that aim to address this issue, including providing more clarity on how clients may appeal suspension decisions, how incidents are recorded and how we communicate policies to clients. We have also increased required training for staff on Fair Housing, client grievances, customer service, de-escalation techniques, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Our client services and security staff mirror the diversity of the population they serve and we will continue prioritizing the hiring and retention of employees who care for their community..

We recognize that the Black population experiences homelessness at significantly higher rates than the general population. This disparity must be addressed and, as a society, we must work together to meet the moment.”

On Client Concerns

“The foundation of our work at Father Joe’s Villages begins and ends with CREED: Compassion, Respect, Empathy, Empowerment & Dignity. When any client is treated in a way that violates their right to health, safety or dignity, that is a grave failure.

To protect and respect client and employee confidentiality, we cannot publicly comment on specific allegations or concerns. However, any incidents that impede a client or employee’s right to health, safety or dignity are taken with utmost gravity. We investigate, address and resolve all such complaints in a timely manner.

For issues related to site maintenance and repairs on City property, such as Golden Hall where we are precluded from remedying those situations, Father Joe’s Villages will continue to alert the City of damages so that those concerns can be promptly corrected by the City.

We look forward to our continued collaboration with the San Diego Housing Commission so that we may better serve those who entrust their care to us.”

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