



San Diego City Attorney
Mara W. Elliott



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Mayor Gloria to Sign into Law Ordinance Strengthening Free Speech ‘Buffer Zone’ Protections

*Proposal by City Attorney Mara W. Elliott will Protect Access
and Create Safer Environments Around Health Clinics,
Schools, Places of Worship*

San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott joined Mayor Todd Gloria, City Councilmembers, and community leaders on Monday, June 24, 2024, as the Mayor signed into law an ordinance that strengthens protections surrounding free speech buffer zones.

The changes were championed by City Attorney Elliott, Chief Deputy City Attorney Heather Ferbert, and Deputy City Attorneys Julie Rau and Eric LaGuardia, and passed unanimously by the City Council. This ordinance will protect access to places that have increasingly seen First Amendment demonstrations, such as healthcare clinics, schools, and places of worship.

To show their support, the City Councilmembers present included Council President Pro Tem Joe LaCava, District 1, and City Councilmembers Stephen Whitburn (District 3), Kent Lee (District 6), Marni von Wilpert (District 5), and Raul Campillo (District 7). Guest speakers representing several affected community demographics including David Vance, from the Center in Hillcrest and Sabrina Bazzo, on behalf of the San Diego Unified School Board, shared their support of this ordinance.

City Attorney Elliott stated, **“I wrote the law to protect patients and the people who serve them in two key ways:**

First, any patient seeking care must first give consent before a protestor can approach them verbally or physically. This empowers the patient to determine who enters their buffer zone, creating a 15-foot barrier of safety. Up until this legislation was enacted, protestors were free to enter a patient’s buffer zone until they were asked to leave.

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Secondly, organizations whose operations are impaired or disrupted by protest activity can now file lawsuits against individual protestors. This helps protect patients and staff from intimidation, harassment, and physical threats. My hope is that these much-needed measures will serve as a model for cities and states around the country. Together, we will continue to fight to keep access to medical care, education, and worship free of violence and obstruction.”

The proposal creates safe environments for demonstrations and other First Amendment activities to be conducted without subjecting individuals to unreasonable harassment and abuse.

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