

**KGO-TV/ABC7**  
**SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA**  
**QUARTERLY LISTING OF COMMUNITY ISSUES AND**  
**RELATED PROGRAMMING**  
**FOURTH QUARTER – October 1 - December 31, 2023**  
**REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING**

**During the fourth quarter of 2023, KGO-TV/ABC7 aired the following regularly scheduled local newscasts identified on air as “ABC7 News” with a total cumulative average of approximately 140 hours per month:**

**Monday – Friday      5:00-7:00AM**

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Reggie Agui, Kumasi Aaron, Meteorologist Drew Tuma, Traffic anchor Jobina Fortson.

This morning news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national, and international news, weather, traffic, health, financial and consumer news.

**Monday – Friday\*      11:00AM-12:00PM**

ABC7 News Midday Live- Anchored by Julian Glover, Kristen Sze, Meteorologist Drew Tuma.

This late morning news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national, and international news, weather, health, and consumer news. Anchors conduct live or taped interviews with local newsmakers and discuss hot topics in the news of the day.

**Monday – Friday\*\*      3:00-3:30PM**

ABC7 News Getting Answers- Anchored by Kristen Sze.

This news program is a live interactive interview program in which viewers can submit questions to live newsmaker guests. Topics include Covid health, local politics, and community leaders.

**Monday – Friday      4:00-5:00PM**

ABC7 News at 4pm- Anchored by Larry Beil, Kristen Sze, Weather Spencer Christian and Meteorologists Sandhya Patel, Seven on Your Side Consumer Reporter Michael Finney.

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, health, technology and consumer news. Anchors conduct live interviews with local newsmakers on topics of daily interest.

**Monday – Friday      5:00-5:30PM**

ABC7 News at 5pm- Anchored by Dan Ashley, Ama Daetz, Meteorologist Sandhya Patel.

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national, and international news, weather, health, technology, and consumer news.

**Monday – Friday 6:00-7:00PM**

ABC7 News at 6pm- Anchored by Dan Ashley, Ama Daetz, Meteorologist Sandhya Patel and Weather forecaster Spencer Christian, Sports Larry Beil. Seven on Your Side Consumer Reporter Michael Finney.

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, health, climate change, consumer news and sports.

**Monday – Friday 11:00-11:35PM**

ABC7 News at 11pm- Anchored by Dan Ashley, Ama Daetz, Meteorologist Sandhya Patel, Sports Larry Beil.

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

**Saturday & Sunday 11:00PM-12:00AM**

ABC7 News at 11pm- Anchored by Dion Lim, Weather Spencer Christian, Sports Chris Alvarez

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

**Saturday & Sunday 5:00-6:00AM / 6:00-7:00AM**

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Liz Kreutz, Meteorologist Lisa Argen

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

**Saturday & Sunday 9:00AM-10:00AM**

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Liz Kreutz, Meteorologist Lisa Argen

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

**Saturday & Sunday 5:00-5:30PM & 6:00-6:30PM**

ABC7 News at 5pm & 6pm- Anchored by Dion Lim, Weather Spencer Christian, Sports Chris Alvarez

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

***\*Titled- "Midday Live"***

***\*\*Titled- "Getting Answers"***

## **THE LOCALISH NETWORK- KGO-TV/ABC7 / 7.2 HD**

KGO-TV/ABC7's D2 sub-channel aired the "Localish Network" which broadcasts numerous half-hour programs covering a variety of topics featuring locally sourced yet nationally relevant stories such as Glam Lab, Bit Sized, Secretly Awesome, and Worth the Wait to name a few. The network also airs MORE IN COMMON, a program featuring inspiring stories of Americans who come together despite their differences, and ALL GOOD, a program highlighting the people making positive differences in their communities.

## **SEVEN ON YOUR SIDE**

Michael Finney headed KGO-TV/ABC7 consumer affairs unit that provided consumer information / product recalls during local 4:00PM and other ABC7 newscasts and provided investigations / resolutions during 6:00pm newscasts. Seven on Your Side consumer counselors answered letters, email and hotline telephone calls from viewers seeking help with a wide variety of consumer problems. The unit received approximately 4000 e-mails during the 4th quarter of 2023.

# Community Outreach Events

## 4th Quarter 2023

### **Allies in Action: Sarahi Perez**

In honor of Bullying Prevention Month, KGO featured Sarahi Perez from Boys and Girls Clubs of the Peninsula (BGCP). Joining BGCP in the fifth grade, Perez was grappling with persistent bullying and self-doubt. Today, she is a teen staff member and fierce youth advocate for those that have been in her shoes before. She is one of many that found themselves and a family at the center.

### **Allies in Action: Jim Oswald**

For Thanksgiving, KGO expressed gratitude for our nonprofit direct service organizations. Meals on Wheels spokesperson Jim Oswald shares how the program not only delivers nutritious meals to older adults in San Francisco, it provides a sense of companionship and other vital services.

### **Dan Ashley's Friends of Camp Concord Golf Tournament: October 2**

KGO's Dan Ashley hosted his 27th annual Golf Tournament at Crow Canyon Country Club in Danville. The fundraiser celebrated 40 years of Friends of Camp Concord. Since 1997, this event has helped send more than 12,000 underserved kids annually to experience summer camp for one week of Camp Concord in Lake Tahoe.

### **Boy Scouts Construction Lunch-O-Ree: October 6**

KGO's Larry Beil MC'd the Boy Scouts Golden Gate Area Council's Construction Industry Lunch-O-Ree at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square. This year's event honored Swinerton CEO Eric Foster and featured keynote speaker Hunter Pence, former San Francisco Giants right fielder. Since 1978, the construction industry has raised more than \$8 M in support of the council.

### **San Francisco Pride Golf Tournament: October 9**

KGO employees participated in a foursome for San Francisco Pride's 5th Annual Golf Tournament at Harding Park in San Francisco. In partnership with Top Golf, this prestigious tournament is the first-ever LGBTQ+ sporting event to be officially endorsed by the PGA. Since its inception in 2019, the event has become a strong symbol of increased LGBTQ+ representation in professional athletics.

### **Independence High School Visit: October 17**

KGO's Mimi Kwan hosted students from Independence High School for a visit behind the scenes to experience newsroom operations and a live newscast in the studio.

### **Oakland Style's Inspiring Conversations w/Creative Oakland Icons: Oct 19**

KGO's Jobina Fortson moderated an enlightening conversation at Kissel Uptown Oakland with a diverse panel of Oakland Stylemakers, including Bandaloop's Melecio Estrella, jewelry designer Dorian Webb, artist Taylor Smalls, fashion designer Taylor Jay, Michelin Star Chef James Syhabout and rapper, songwriter, entrepreneur, community organizer, activist Mistah F.A.B.

**Youth Beat tour: October 25**

KGO's Mimi Kwan and Naomi Vanderlip hosted apprentice participants of Youth Beat for a glimpse of how the newscast comes together. The guests visited the newsroom, control room and studio for a live newscast.

**Walk to End Alzheimer's East Bay: October 28**

KGO's Dan Ashley MC'd the program to kick off the Walk to End Alzheimer's East Bay fundraiser at Bishop Ranch in San Ramon.

**Walk to End Alzheimer's San Francisco: November 4**

KGO's Reggie Aqui MC'd the program to kick off the Walk to End Alzheimer's San Francisco fundraiser at Pier 27 in San Francisco.

**Paul Revere Middle School: November 6**

KGO's Jobina Fortson spoke to students at Paul Revere Middle School in San Francisco about careers in broadcast journalism and her path to becoming an anchor/reporter.

**APEC Business Advisory Council: November 13**

KGO's Dion Lim MC'd the gala dinner for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's Business Advisory Council at Westin St. Francis in San Francisco. Speakers included East West Bank CEO Dominic Ng, California Lt. Governor Eleni Kounalakis and U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

**APEC Business Advisory Council: November 18**

KGO's Dion Lim MC'd the Saturday luncheon for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's National API Elected Officials Summit at Westin St. Francis in San Francisco. Speakers included Acting U.S. Labor Secretary Julie Su, as well as many distinguished civic and community leaders. Attendees included hundreds of current API Elected Officials, representatives from APEC Member countries/regions and the world's top business leaders.

**ABC7 Day of Giving: November 28**

KGO spent the full day of Giving Tuesday spotlighting important charities in the Bay Area. Featured nonprofits included Junior Achievement of Northern California, Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir, Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley, Project by Project, Meals on Wheels, Ruby's Place, There With Care, Healthy Planet Project, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank, Guidestar, as well as check presentations with our five Feeding America-member food banks (Alameda County Community Food Bank, Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano, Redwood

Empire Food Bank, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley and San Francisco-Marín Food Bank).

**Winter Wonderland and Lighting Ceremony: November 29**

KGO's Ama Daetz MC'd The Thrive City Winter Wonderland and Lighting Ceremony at Chase Center in San Francisco. The event boasted about having the Bay Area's tallest tree (standing at 90 feet tall) and live music from Darryl McDaniels, founder and original member of Run DMC.

**Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir Holiday Concert: December 2**

KGO's Kumasi Aaron MC'd and performed at Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir's (OIGC) Holiday Concert at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland. The mission of OIGC is to inspire joy and unity among all people through Black gospel and spiritual music traditions.

**Amazon Web Services Girls Tech Day: December 4**

KGO's Gloria Rodriguez MC'd a panel at San Jose Civic Center and Tech Interactive Museum to encourage girls to pursue STEAM education careers. 600 eighth-grade girls from Hayward Unified School District schools. Event was hosted by Amazon Web Services and featured hands-on STEAM activities.

**Take Action San Francisco Town Hall: December 4**

KGO hosted a first-ever, live town hall conversation with San Francisco Mayor London Breed, Police Chief William Scott and District Attorney Brook Jenkins. The hour-long discussion at Exploratorium's Kanbar Forum was moderated by ABC7's Reggie Aqui, Lyanne Melendez and Phil Matier and live streamed 7pm to 8pm and broadcasted in full the following weekend. Discussion topics included crime, homelessness, drug overdose crisis, economy and what the future holds for our youth.

**SF-Marín Food Bank Volunteering: December 6**

KGO employees volunteered at the San Francisco-Marín Food Bank's Illinois warehouse, packing 620 grocery bags for homebound residents in need. Each bag weighed about 24 pounds, filled with fresh produce and eggs, to a sum of 14,880 pounds.

**Oakland Symphony Holiday Concert: December 10**

KGO's Dan Ashley performed at Oakland Symphony's Holiday Concert at the Paramount Theatre. This year's edition paid tribute to the memory of the legendary Tina Turner.

**Make-A-Wish, Starlight Children's Foundation Card-making: December 13**

KGO employees created holiday cards through Disney VolunTEARS and Starlight Children's Foundation for Make-A-Wish participants and young patients in children's hospitals. The campaign conveyed messages of encouragement and magic for card recipients.

**Toys for Tots/Disney Ultimate Toy Drive: Through December 15**

KGO served as a donation drop-off location for the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation toy drive. Over 120 toys were collected and picked up for the San Bruno unit, serving children in need in San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin counties.

**Festival of the Globe: Toy & Blanket Drive: December 17**

KGO's Sandhya Patel volunteered at Festival of the Globe's Toy & Blanket Drive at the Fremont Hindu Temple. Donated items were handed out to children and families in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin and Santa Clara counties.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS 4th Quarter 2023**

- **Asian American Cancer Support Network**
- **Defining Courage Show**
- **Disney Ultimate Toy Drive: Marine Toys for Tots Foundation**
- **Festival of the Globe**
- **Glide Foundation**
- **Habitat for Humanity East Bay/Silicon Valley**
- **Kimochi**
- **Make-A-Wish Foundation**
- **Mental Health Association of Alameda County**
- **Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir**
- **Project Roadblock**
- **Starlight Foundation**
- **Walk to End Alzheimer's**
- **Wender Weis Foundation for Children**



***KGO-TV/ABC7 also airs syndicated programming on its main D1 channel that includes Children’s Core Programming as described in the Children’s 398 Report which is filed separately in the Public Inspection File.***

**\* \* \* \***

**In addition to the local news and public affairs programs described in this report, KGO-TV/ABC7 carries all of the ABC Television news & public affairs programs listed and described in the report filed as “Network Programming.”**

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**KGO-TV/ABC7 applies feedback from the community in determining the key local issues, problems, and needs. Some of the station’s most significant treatments of these issues are described on the following pages:**

**CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**EDUCATION**

**HEALTH**

**CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT**

**ECONOMY & CHANGING WORKPLACE**

**RACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE**



# **CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**Monday, October 2, 2023**

**Federal student loan payments resume. Here's why it may affect Bay Area borrowers more**

After a three year hiatus, millions of Californians are bracing for a dreaded deadline requiring student loan repayments that restarted Sunday. Some Bay Area borrowers are bracing for a big financial hit. "So living in San Francisco and the income threshold that they rolled out in the plan doesn't really align with the cost of living here," said Emily Machado, a Redwood City native. For Machado, it means more worry. "A lot of adrenaline and just kind of frantic scrolling, trying to understand it all," she said.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Biden administration plan to forgive loans to more than 40 million Americans - including up to \$20,000 of debt for those who received a Pell grant, offered to low-income families. "I was a Pell grant recipient, so I was eligible potentially to receive up to \$20,000 in cancellation as opposed to the standard \$10,000 cancellation," Machado said. Due to income thresholds that were set, which don't take into account where you're living, Machado got nothing. And like many in her position living in the Bay Area, she's struggling to pay other bills with rising inflation. "It's certainly overwhelming coming out of college to a large pile of money that that needs to be taken care of," she said. "I'm just trying to get a better grasp on what I need to do."

According to the U.S. Department of Education, borrowers should immediately login to their federal student aid website to update any required information and find out who your loan servicer is to explore payment options. These include auto pay or income-driven payment plans. Economist Bryce Gill says the impact is really dependent on income. "So for example, you look at the average payment people are going to have to make, it's about \$300 your undergraduate degree, and goes up to about \$500 on the average per month for a graduate degree," said Gill. But the Biden administration passed what's called the SAVE plan, which is an income-driven repayment plans. The White House says borrowers who make more than \$15 per hour and enroll are expected to save about \$1,000 more per year compared to other payment options.

According to the most recent report compiled by the Public Policy Institute of California as of 2020, U.S. borrowers hold about \$1.6 trillion in federal student loan debt - and Californians are responsible for more than \$142 billion of it. But Gill says the White House is rolling out some help. He explains one example is what's called the "On-Ramp Transition Period" which protects your credit if you have missed or late payments. Just keep in mind, it's temporary. "So you're not going to be able to, let's say, 5 years from now, keep missing payments, and

have your credit score not be impacted. So this is sort of short term bridge," Gill said. "Definitely will need to be a little bit more mindful of spending," Machado said. "Things are really expensive right now." Interest on federal student loan payments has started accruing since Sept. 1. The Department of Education says you should expect your first loan bill within 21 days of its due date.

### **Wednesday, October 18, 2023**

#### **Lost track of a pension? This free service will find it for you**

Talk about your tax dollars at work. If you have lost track of a pension or think your pension is shortchanging you, there is help available and it is free. It is called the Western States Pension Assistance Project (WSPA) and is administered by Legal Services of Northern California. "We're often helping individuals who were in the workforce 30 or 40 years ago," says Jennifer Anders-Gable of the WSPA. "People at or past retirement age now, and they are trying to locate a benefit that they earned." Joyce Shappee of Concord was in that exact situation. "There's no way I would have been able to find this on my own, because I went from different companies to different subsidiaries. Nobody knew what I was talking about, nobody knew what the company was," she said.

"It's like roadblock after roadblock and we have to keep providing new information or re-explaining things," says Anders-Gable. "Or in that case it was really connecting the dots. 'This is why you are, in fact, the one responsible for this person's benefit.'" It took more than a year, but the pension was found and activated. "They were very responsive and very tenacious about it," says Shappee, "which I really did appreciate, because like I said, this would have never happened, I don't think, if it wasn't for them. Truly. I can't say enough good about them because of that." For Shappee's case, the WSPA tracked down corporate mergers; other times the detective work might rely on photographs or even awards for "years of service."

"We've had situations where some companies, 'Here's your pin for 10 years of service,' or 'Here's your plaque.' That doesn't necessarily show the amount of your pension that you're in, but we have the pin," Anders-Gable said. "We have the magical hats, or whatever the thing is, and we have used all the things to support our claims, and a lot of times it's helpful." She says those who are still working should hang on to all their paystubs, retirement plan booklets and tax returns. "You want to keep all those documents because you don't know what you don't know now, and you don't know what you won't know in the future," she said.

### **Tuesday, October 31, 2023**

#### **How long should you keep your financial paperwork? Here's what you and your loved ones need to know**

How long should you keep your paperwork? Tax returns, and the like? The usual advice is seven years and some actually advise three years. And some, forever. Walnut Creek wealth advisor George Noceti helps his clients with money management, and that includes management of the paperwork surrounding their money. "There are things that we should keep for seven years like tax returns, your deductions, records of things that you've sold mortgage documents, medical records. There's things you should just keep for one year - like bank statements, pay stubs, quarterly investment statements, canceled checks," Noceti said. A good reminder of solid advice, but Noceti says there are some things you should just plan to hang on to.

"There are some things that you should keep forever - like your birth certificates and death certificates, your Social Security card, your ID card, your passports (even your expired ones), merit certificates, divorce decrees, adoption papers, and record of your home purchase insurance policies are really critical," Noceti says. Jennifer Anders-Gable from the Western States Pension Assistance Project said, "So you want to keep all those documents because you don't know what you don't know now, and you don't know what you won't know in the future." Her organization helps people find and get money from their pensions. Sometimes her clients need paperwork proof from 30 to 40 years ago, such as if they paid into the pension and if they got an early payout.

"Because most people don't need to think about their pension until they're in their sixties. 'Why would I hold on to something from my employment years?' And again it's proving that negative," Anders-Gable says. She says if you have a pension, hang on to the pension booklet and paystubs forever. Same with tax returns from that work period. Which brings us to where all that paperwork should be stored. "Some people will keep their living trust document in their safe deposit at the bank. So that's a good safe place for it, except that if you pass, and the bank finds out, they lock your safe deposit box up and nobody can get to the will and trust," Anders-Gable says. You can save a lot of this electronically, but consider making multiple copies.

### **Friday, November 3, 2023**

#### **Draft of insurance reforms would allow companies to not cover wildfire areas, advocacy group says**

This past session, the California legislature declined to pass changes to the regulation of insurance companies. The Insurance Commissioner, Ricardo Lara, was said to have a proposal floating around in private, but the parent of California insurance regulation, Consumer Watchdog, was never shown any planned regulations. Consumer Watchdog filed a public records request and says the documents it received proves the proposed bill was a lousy deal for consumers. "We did get this one draft proposal that was apparently drafted by the Insurance Commissioner that would give away all his authority and power over the insurance companies," says Harvey Rosenfield of Consumer Watchdog. "It

would basically deregulate the insurance companies." A big selling point for the proposal, 7 On Your Side was told, was a guarantee that insurance companies would sell more insurance in difficult-to-insure parts of the state, like wildfire areas. The documents, as read by Consumer Watchdog, would allow insurance companies to wiggle out of that part of the agreement. "When you look at the fine print of the proposal, that we obtained, that the commissioner drafted, there's absolutely zero commitment to come back into the marketplace," says Rosenfield.

7 On Your Side asked for an interview with Commissioner Lara. He did not reply, but we did receive a statement from Deputy Insurance Commissioner Michael Soller: "Consumer Watchdog's latest cynical claims hide the truth that the group has earned millions of dollars signing off on rate increases -- while denying the reality that insurance has become impossible for some Californians to find at any price... Consumer Watchdog is turning a blind eye to consumers' needs while defending its own insurance piggy bank." The deputy commissioner is referring to a portion of the Commission's website. It says public participation in the rate setting process is authorized to recover their costs, expenses, and attorney's fees. Deputy Commissioner Soller says Consumer Watchdog has collected nearly \$9 million. Consumer Watchdog says its challenges to homeowner's insurance rates have saved Californians \$2.2 billion.

### **Saturday, November 11, 2023**

#### **Bill to offer competition in 'swipe fees' may also do away with credit card points and rewards**

Each time a credit card is used, the merchant is charged what is commonly called a "swipe fee" of 2% to 3% of the purchase. That fee is split between the processors -- usually MasterCard and Visa -- and the banks that issued the card. U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) doesn't like that set up. He said, "These swipe fees are inflation multipliers." At a recent news conference, he called it unfair to consumers and retailers. Senator Durbin said, "Visa and MasterCard set the fees on behalf of thousands of banks and tell the merchants to take it or leave it. There is no negotiation, there is no competition." The senator has introduced a bipartisan bill called the Credit Card Competition Act, which would require credit cards to offer two different processing networks - and one cannot be MasterCard or Visa.

The Electronic Payments Coalition represents processors, banks and others opposed to the bill. It says this is a money grab by big retailers. I spoke with Steven Au from Au Points and Awards Consulting. He helps consumers gather and use credit card points. I asked him if this could lead to the potential ending of credit card points. Au said, "Yes, absolutely. This is the most serious attack to undermine credit card rewards that has ever existed." Brian Kelly, founder of The Points Guy, won't go so far as saying points could disappear altogether. However, he says if the bill becomes law, points will drop from one to

three per dollar spent, to one half point per dollar spent. "The points will get shifted into the pockets of the retailers," Kelly says, "and they're saying, 'Well, don't worry. Trust us. If you give us billions we'll trickle down the savings to consumers.'" Senator Durbin says, "If the Credit Card Competition Act were enacted, rewards would be reduced by less than one-tenth of 1% at most." The Senator sent 7 On Your Side a statement that in part reads: "Claims that my bipartisan bill with Senator Marshall would make credit card rewards disappear is nonsense."

### **Monday, November 20, 2023**

#### **SF city attorney files lawsuit against gift card company over inadequate security, scams**

San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu is making a bold pre-holiday move designed to help consumers with their gift card purchases. He has filed suit against a giant in the gift card business: Incomm, makers of Vanilla brand gift cards. These are the cards you find on racks in places like Walmart and Walgreens. "Consumers who are buying the gift cards known as Vanilla gift cards are getting scammed out of hundreds of dollars," David Chiu says. "The typical scenario is a consumer purchases a Vanilla gift card, and as soon as they go to use them they find out that the balance is zero." Chui's complaint says thieves take cards from the rack, steal their codes, then put the cards back on the rack for unsuspecting buyers who then load them with cash.

"This is a scam known as card draining," Chiu says, "It's a relatively unsophisticated crime. It's made possible by Incomm's inadequate security." Chiu told me, "Incomm has been regularly refusing to provide refunds to consumers who've lost money, which is in violation of state and federal law." InComm Payments provided this statement: "Fraud prevention is a top priority at InComm Payments, and we continuously collaborate with security experts, merchant partners and law enforcement to combat emerging threats. We are aware of the lawsuit and, while we do not comment on active litigation, we stand by the quality of our products and will vigorously defend the allegations in the complaint. We remain committed to serving our customers with reliable prepaid card products and payments technology solutions."

### **Monday, November 27, 2023**

#### **SIM swap victim loses \$46K as thieves take over her phone number and bank accounts**

Amanda Moon has gone through a lot. "I had to stop working. I wasn't able to take care of my kids. It was like, it was kind of like I was mentally like, just... It was very distressing," Moon said. Moon's bank account was raided and over \$46,000 stolen. She says the thieves managed to get her mobile phone service switched over to them. "So I was a victim of SIM swapping and somebody had hacked my bank accounts and stole money and the banks were refusing to

return the funds to me," she said. Moon contacted her bank Chase. She also contacted the bank where her money was wired, Wells Fargo, and her mobile phone provider, Comcast Xfinity. "I also contacted like the BBB, the CFPB. And so the companies were reaching out to me. So I was speaking with them. They denied all my requests," Moon said.

She just kept going, had an attorney friend send a letter. "So actually a coworker had recommended that I reach out to you, and I had known about you, and I felt like maybe you could help me with my situation," she said. Moon did not give up. "I don't know. I think it was like a cumulative thing or I don't know if that made Chase change their minds. They ended up giving the money back," Moon said. "All of it." All \$46,000.

7 On Your Side asked Chase for a comment: "We refunded our customer in full after reviewing her case. If you suspect any fraudulent activity, call the number on the back of your card to report it to your bank." Wells Fargo tells us it sent Moon a letter and "respectfully requested that she continue to work with her financial institution." Comcast Xfinity told 7 On Your Side that "the issue is still being looked into and we will follow up once we receive more information." If something bad happens to you, do what Moon did. Contact everyone you can think of and don't stop trying.

### **Wednesday, December 6, 2023**

#### **EDD drops Bank of America as unemployment payment contractor**

Big news for those collecting unemployment payments. Bank of America is out and Money Network is in. You may remember during the pandemic there were huge problems with getting unemployment benefits paid to those who were eligible. Bank of America was accused of being responsible for many of the delays. Eventually the bank announced it wanted out, but the EDD kept the bank as the payment company. That changes on Feb. 15 when the Money Network takes over by issuing debit cards just as Bank of America has been doing. However, the EDD says a few months later the Money Network will offer direct deposits. Consumer advocates had been asking for this for years. Information about the changeover will be sent to those receiving payments from the EDD.

### **Thursday, December 14, 2023**

#### **FBI warns holiday shoppers to beware of scammers online**

Check out the holiday shopping and you see happy people buying wonderful gifts. Go online and you get the same vibe, but it is more treacherous. Special agent in charge of the FBI San Francisco field office, Robert Tripp, explains why: "Scammers love anonymity, and they like ready cash, and the internet unfortunately offers both of those things to scammers." Special Agent Tripp says when shopping online it is important to know the seller. "We see a lot of the

simplest kind of scam that you can think of, the non-delivery scam," Tripp says. "Somebody's out there shopping for gifts for their family.

They'll see an incredible offer, either in an email that they receive unsolicited or online. They'll pay money for what they think is going to be a great gift for a family member, and they'll never receive the good. It was a scam from start to finish." Tripp says it is harder to spot a criminal now because they are using the latest technology. "AI has had an impact on the scams that we're seeing," Tripp says. "In the past, a lack of fluency in English was a potential red flag. If you're dealing with somebody that you don't know, however, AI scammers are able to create very, very convincing exchanges with victims, especially over text." If you get ripped off, contact your credit card company or bank, then report the crime.

### **Monday, December 18, 2023**

#### **FAIR Plan insurance policies delayed as more homeowners turn to the 'insurance of last resort'**

Mark and Alma O'Brien's Napa County ranch dodged major damage in a grass fire, however it did not dodge all of the fallout. When ABC7 News spoke with them last year, their insurance company had dropped the couple's coverage. "We have been trying to find alternative insurance," says Mark O'Brien. "I went to three or four different carriers and got turned down." They were looking at potentially signing up for California's insurer of last resort, the FAIR Plan. That is where you are sent when no insurance companies will offer you coverage. The insurance is more expensive, covers less and has a high deductible... And now, it's also difficult to get. Amy Bach is the founder of the consumer group United Policyholders. "So the FAIR Plan is getting a thousand applications a day. They switched over to a new computer platform and there seem to be a lot of kinks. So we are getting panicked emails from homeowners, from agents saying 'I can't reach anybody.' Some agents are saying it's taking two weeks to get a policy locked in and just there's a lot of anxiety out there," Bach says.

Karl Susman is an insurance broker in Los Angeles. He says it is hard to even talk with a FAIR Plan employee. "We have a system now where we have one person in the office is always on hold with the FAIR Plan because the hold time is four hours a day," Susman says. When one of the Susman staffers get a pick-up, the phone is passed around to get policies ordered and updates on those that are already in the system. "They are quoting 14 to 21 days to get a quote," says Susman. "People that are in escrow, how much in advance do they look? The day before? Two or three days before? It is not possible if they have to go with the FAIR Plan." If you are buying a home, do not treat homeowner's insurance like an afterthought, or you will get burned. Now, Karl Susman did have some good news to pass along. He says if you know to ask for it, the FAIR Plan is offering payment plans. That could make it much easier to afford for some homeowners.

# Education

**Thursday, October 12, 2023**

## **San Francisco Unified workers vote to authorize strike**

San Francisco Unified School District workers on Thursday voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike. The United Educators of San Francisco announced the results of the vote by members to give leaders the authorization to call for a strike. More than 3,000 members voted, with 97% saying yes to the strike. The union that represents 900 para-educators, food service workers, and custodians voted last week to authorize a strike. They want the district to keep up with what the city pays for similar jobs, which they say is up to 25% higher. The union says its contract expired at the end of June.

**Tuesday, October 17, 2023**

## **Does your kid know cursive? It's coming back as a requirement to CA schools**

Traditional handwriting is making a comeback in California schools. On Friday Governor Newsom signed a bill that will require cursive instruction in first through sixth grade. Abigail Soriano-Lentz is the English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator for the East Side Union High School District. Soriano-Lentz said if you were to ask educators, there's a wide range of points of view on cursive. Research shows there are benefits. "Handwriting actually activates different parts of the brain that do not get activated when printing block letters or typing," Soriano-Lentz said.

Cursive writing is part of the state standard, but it varies with each classroom. Now that AB 446 has been signed, learning cursive is going to be new for students and for some teachers. "For thirteen years our teacher education programs have said cursive is not part of the standards so we have quite a chunk of teachers who have not taught it and who haven't needed to teach it and some who probably were not taught it themselves," Soriano-Lentz said. At the high school level, Soriano-Lentz said there's a mix of students who can and cannot read and write in cursive. Those who cannot have a difficult time looking at primary source documents in history and English classes.

Soriano-Lentz said as artificial intelligence becomes a factor, handwritten essays may be something to consider. Beth Hankoff is an English and Language Arts private tutor. She said mandates can be tricky, and teaching should be open for different kids. "A lot of the neurodiverse and disabled kids I've worked with actually do better with cursive," Hankoff said. "I've read that it has something to do with a different part of the brain that's the same part you use for drawing and those flowing movements can really help kids- they don't have to keep picking up



the pencil and replacing it and where on the page to place it. I'm judging this from their words and their work."

Victoria Lara is a calligrapher based out of Napa and works throughout the Bay Area. Four years ago Lara turned her passion into a business and started Blossom and Ink Studio. "I do in-studio and on-site events so I've worked with big brands local businesses," Lara said. Lara said learning cursive has helped transfer her skill of lettering to engravings and wood burning. At almost every event, Lara said people appreciate her work and tell her "It's a dying art." "Having something handwritten is just- it's a different feeling it's a very emotional feeling behind it," Lara said.

Lara said her son in high school wasn't taught cursive as much, and he's learned the skill more through her calligraphy. "Now he's used to it. It definitely takes him a little longer to read the notecards or whatever it is but he definitely has gotten used to it now and that's something I told him honey like- we need to work on your cursive," Lara said. Lara supports the effort to bring the basics of cursive to the classroom. "If it's something they truly love and truly are passionate about - they'll continue exploring that even years down the line. For myself it's been years since I practiced it in the classroom but now being able to have that as my business, it just makes me so happy," Lara said.

### **Wednesday, October 18, 2023**

#### **San Francisco Unified School District, service workers reach tentative agreement to avert strike**

The San Francisco Unified School District announced on Wednesday it has reached a tentative agreement with the service workers union to avert a strike. The agreement would give a 6% salary increase for 2022-2023 year and a 10% increase for 2023-2024 year, SFUSD said. In addition, SFUSD will provide a one-time stipend of \$1,500 per employee. "We're pleased to reach a tentative agreement with our labor partners," SFUSD Superintendent Dr. Matt Wayne said. "Service workers are essential to making our schools work for kids, and this agreement reflects our collective commitment to valuing the integral roles they hold in our school communities."

In addition, both parties agreed to work together on issues such as access to affordable housing and additional employee benefit options. The tentative agreement will be finalized after vote by the San Francisco Board of Education at an upcoming meeting. The union represents about 1,060 employees including school secretaries, custodians, food service workers, health workers, and more.

### **Thursday, October 26, 2023**

#### **Hundreds of UC Berkeley students hold walkout, calling for cease-fire in Gaza**

Across the U.S., students staged walkouts at college campuses with a list of demands, including calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza. Hundreds of people of diverse backgrounds marched and rallied at UC Berkeley's Sproul Hall with a simple message. "The message is cease-fire. Now. Immediately. And to allow humanitarian aid to enter into Gaza," said Haleema Bharoocha, a graduate student studying public policy. Bharoocha is one of the student organizers of the rally and a teach-in focused on the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza. "Churches being bombed. Mosques being bombed. This felt like a call that I had to respond to," Bharoocha said.

The event at UC Berkeley was organized by several Palestinian campus organizations. Many were wearing masks, fearful of being identified as the political climate heats up on college campuses across the U.S. "I feel like as a member of an oppressed minority, I understand the plight of the Palestinian people," said one of the Black students in attendance, who was wearing a mask and didn't want to give her name. One of the speakers was Professor Ussama Makdisi, who teaches history. "It really is the most basic message of the universe. Palestinians are humans. They deserve freedom. They deserve equality like everybody else. It is as simple as that," Makdisi said. A small group of Jewish group students were on hand as well. Vida Kayvarnfar, who is organizing a Friday rally involving Jewish students, says some the chants make her feel unsafe on campus.

"The chants, 'From the river to the sea.' For the Jewish people who live there, 'river to the sea' means annihilation of all of them. That means executing every single Jewish person," Kayvarnfar said. Many Palestinian students say they dispute that argument. "We dispute this claim because 'From the river to the sea' is that Palestinians have a right to return to their homes. This right is enshrined in international law, in the Geneva Convention," said Rami Abdelkarim, who is with the group Palestinian Youth Movement. Many students who attended say it is important for students to get involved. "It is really important that we make our voices heard, as the people of the U.S., because that is the only way any of this is going to change," said Iris Rosenblum-Seller, a Jewish student with the group Graduate Students for Justice in Palestine.

### **Monday, November 6, 2023**

#### **How San Francisco hopes to retain teachers through affordable housing options**

The affordability crunch is all too common for many teachers in the Bay Area. "I have not been able to just be a teacher. I also have to pick up side jobs," said Emily Madriz, a young teacher in San Francisco. Today, a large number of educator households in cities like San Francisco spend nearly half of their salaries on rent. That's a problem when trying to retain them. "The school districts have seen when educators don't feel like they can afford to live in the communities that they teach, that it's difficult for them to be attracted to new jobs

and to keep them in the jobs they already have," expressed Anne Stanley of the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development.

"I feel that all teachers that live in their school area, benefit from being so close, not only for getting to know the community at a very personal level but also to be able to represent the community," added Madriz. But not so long ago, some local communities and teachers themselves rejected any proposals to build teacher housing. Take Dianne Feinstein Elementary in the Sunset District. When it was built in 2005, the plans included a 45-unit building for teachers and staff. The U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development was ready to provide some funds, but the community and then Supervisor Leland Yee opposed it and it never got built.

"They said oh, it's a public housing project, never let HUD get involved, it will be a slum," former school board member Jill Wynns said. Now San Francisco is trying desperately to catch up. The old Francis Scott Key Annex in the outer Sunset District will now be the Shirley Chisholm Village with 135 units. Lottery applications for teachers and district staff will be available early next year. It was supposed to be completed by 2022 but the pandemic set them back and is now set to open in late 2024. Teachers will be able to stay in their units, as long as they are employed by San Francisco Unified.

Meanwhile, in the Mission District street vendors stand in front of what may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for teachers to finally own property. An old abandoned building on Mission and 18th streets was once an appliance store until the Mission Economic Development Agency, MEDA, purchased it. "We see a lot of folks displaced like having to move out and at the end of the day we don't have qualified teachers staying in San Francisco," said Elaine Yee, of MEDA. The Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development has now set aside \$12 million to begin converting the building into 63 units comprised of two and three bedroom below-market-rate condos for teachers to be completed by 2025-2026.

"So for a three person family making say \$99,000 a year, that would equate to about \$359,000 for a two bedroom condo," outlined Stanley. Going forward, the intention is for these condos to always be affordable for teachers so that means there will be restrictions on the resale price of each condo. There are plans to build more housing at a parking lot on Franklin Street a block from the school district. It will be another rental property for teachers and staff.

The land was previously owed by the state. The same non-profit developing the Shirley Chisholm Village will manage the construction of 75 affordable rental units. To qualify, the household income must be between \$42,000 and \$160,000. "We are the pillar of change that help other folks become pillars of change," said Madriz. "I was born here in San Francisco, I am a native, I grew up here, this is my home and I am not able to live here. Affordable housing would be so helpful."

**Thursday, November 9, 2023**

**San Lorenzo school board responds after special needs kids lost by staff**

We're hearing from San Lorenzo Unified School District board members after a 5-year-old boy with special needs wandered from Del Rey Elementary School without staff noticing and was found a third of a mile away from the school by a driver. School board members are now apologizing to the little boy's mother, but it took her going to the school board meeting Tuesday night. There, parents shared examples of their children with special needs being lost by staff during the school day. The president of the California School Employees Association told board members, staff working in special education classes don't have the training or support they need.

"Our special ed program is dysfunctional. It needs help," said Julie Glenn-Juuko, chapter president of the California School Employees Association. This comes after a 5-year-old boy with special needs left Del Rey Elementary School without staff realizing. A concerned driver found him a third of a mile from the school. "I am appalled by the district's lack of concern for my son - I called, I left messages that same day for you Dr. Camp - for Kim Noble I left messages, voicemails with your assistants, Dr. Camp, nobody from the district called me back. I'm sure anyone here who has a child or knows a 5-year-old, he was running on Bachman road unattended," said Tina G., JoJo's mother.

"We do take that seriously and we want to make sure that all of our students are safe," said San Lorenzo Unified School District Superintendent Daryl Camp. Two other parents shared similar experiences of their children with special needs being lost during the school day including Janee Robinson, whose daughter Murphy was lost last year and later found in a classroom. "We want our kids to learn and have a good environment and be kids, and they can't do that if they don't have the right instructors to help them," said Robinson. A sentiment echoed by the president of the California School Employees Association who questioned the training and qualifications of the district's paraprofessionals, staff members who assist the teacher in a classroom for children with special needs.

"I thought when this made the news, that we would have some plans in place to get this taken care of - but there's nothing," said Glenn-Juuko. ABC7 News I-Team reporter Melanie Woodrow asked the superintendent about the district's Special Ed program. "I would say the vast majority of the school days, things work out," said Camp. "Is it acceptable to you as superintendent for there to be any one day where things don't work out and a child is able to leave the school?" asked Melanie. "There are a lot of gaps in our school system overall, if you look at various achievement measures across the state there are gaps in systems and we're going to work to improve those gaps in the system," said Camp. "What is specifically being done to fill those gaps in the meantime?" asked Melanie.

"I'm not going to talk about the individual situation nor the staffing challenges, but our intent is to have every position filled and sometimes we're able to accomplish that in certain areas and sometimes we do fall short of that," said Camp. For that, board members apologized. "No system is perfect but what we have to do is hold ourselves accountable," said Kyla Sinegal. "I apologize for what you went through," said Juan Campos. Parents hope it's more than empty promises. "Yeah it's acceptable, it's a day and a dollar short and I had to come here," said Tina G. "I'm hopeful, optimistic, cautiously optimistic," said Robinson. Following what happened, Tina G.'s son JoJo is now at a different school within the district. As is Janee's daughter, though her school change was unrelated to her being lost. The district's superintendent says he's proud of school staff and the systems they do have in place.

### **Tuesday, November 28, 2023**

#### **Day of Giving: San Jose school district launches fundraiser for unhoused students**

This holiday season, there are 900 East Side Union High School District students and families who are unhoused. In 2020, that number was just 300. ESUHSD officials say housing costs, inflation, and job loss are just some of the factors contributing to the dramatic increase in San Jose. Blasa Ozuna is the district parent and community-involved specialist at ESUHSD. "Nine hundred is the number today - the number tomorrow will be different. We are qualifying almost 100 new students every single month. We ended last year with a little over 1,200 students district-wide and we anticipate this year we'll be way beyond that number," Ozuna said. The East Side Union High School District oversees 19 campuses with more than 21,000 students.

School officials say inadequate housing looks different for each student - some are with their families staying at motels or shelters, or some are unaccompanied couch surfing. "We've educated our staff on what to listen for - a student may not come up and say I'm homeless, but they may say 'Oh I've been sleeping on my friend's couch for the last week' or 'I don't have a ride to school, you know my dad just lost his job,'" Ozuna said. In the past three years, the district has created a 'district parent and community involved specialist' role at each campus. For Day of Giving on Tuesday, the district and the East Side Education Foundation are launching a fundraiser. It's to supplement the district's McKinney-Vento Program, a federal program created to protect and support enrollment and education of homeless students. The district says 900 homeless students qualify for the program and they're trying to identify more.

Maryam Adalat is the director of student services for ESUHSD. "It's a sensitive situation while we don't want to be intrusive and ask all those questions, we're trying to find a way to be able to capture the information in a more gentle and respective way," Adalat said. In years past, school district officials say they've raised around \$30,000 in order to provide \$100 gift cards per student. This year,

they'll need to raise \$90,000 in order to do the same. "We give our students a gift card as part of our holiday drive and they are often telling me - 'oh I'm going to give this to my mom for groceries' or 'I'm going to buy presents for my younger siblings' or 'I'm going to get my dad some socks' - you know we give them a bag of warm items and they're immediately thinking of their family members," Ozuna said.

**Saturday, December 2, 2023**

### **Oakland Unified opposes pro-Palestinian lesson planned by teachers**

As the war between Israel and Hamas continues, so too does the battle in school districts around the Bay Area. On Wednesday, a group of teachers in Oakland are planning what they call a "Palestine Teach-In." Planning to lead lessons, lead activities, that really center Palestinian stories and experiences," said Jacob. Jacob, who asked us not to use his last name, is one of the OUSD teachers participating. He tells ABC7 News the curriculum the teachers plan on using comes from a variety of sources and is designed for different age groups. That includes an alphabet book on YouTube for TK through third graders, called 'P is for Palestine.' The video makes reference to intifada - an Arabic word that's means rebellion - and has been historically connected to armed uprisings by Palestinians. "The quote from that page says intifada is standing up for yourself or for what's right, which I think is a very age-appropriate way to interact with that term," Jacob said. The Oakland Unified School District has come out against the teach-in.

The statement reads in part: "The District is aware that some educators want to teach their students about the situation in Gaza and Israel with a very specific view of who is at fault and why... It is the job of educators to teach students how to think critically, not to teach them what to think. We are reminding all educators of their responsibility to adhere to principles of education, and to keep their personal beliefs out of the classroom." Those in support of the teach-in reject that statement. They also say they are vehemently opposed to antisemitism in any form. The pushback against the teach-in isn't just coming from OUSD though.

Some local Jewish organizations also think it's inappropriate. That includes Tyler Gregory, the CEO of the local chapter of the Jewish Community Relations Council. "I think that this curriculum incites violence against Jews and Israelis and has no place in any school district," Gregory said. Gregory says his organization has heard from several Jewish families in the district - some of whom plan on keeping their students home from classes that day. He believes at a time of heightened tensions, the teach in will only further divide the community. "We're confident that the administration is going to have consequences for those that participate in this, the teachers. Because it's totally unacceptable," said Gregory.

**Tuesday, December 5, 2023**

## **SF State faculty picketing Tuesday as part of rolling CSU strike**

Banging on drums and chanting, hundreds of striking San Francisco State University faculty and supporters gathered in front of the university president's office Tuesday to demand better wages and improvements to workloads they see as unmanageable. "Union members are striking for better wages, pay equity, manageable workloads, an increased counselor-to-student ratio, expanded parental leave, and other benefits," a press release by the union California Faculty Association stated. The strike was put together by members of the CFA and was preceded by a strike from fellow faculty at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona on Monday. The striking faculty also criticized a plan by SFSU administrators to cut up to 300 lecturer faculty positions and possibly 600 classes next semester. However, the university said this is due to decreased enrollment.

"CSU's non-tenure faculty are some of the lowest paid educators in the state; they need an equity raise to survive," said Brad Erickson, president of CFA's SFSU chapter. "Our members have seen expenses like rent, food and childcare rise by double digits; we need 12% to break even with inflation." The union has proposed cuts to the executive and management budget, which they say outpaces all other employee groups, and criticized a 66% increase since 2020 to the CSU chancellor's salary as well as increases to CSU campus presidents' salaries. "You're going to fight until you get a fair contract," said CFA president Charles Toombs at a rally held during the strike. "We need the salary increases; we need the floor lifted for the majority of our faculty." "SF State respects employees' labor rights," said Kent Bravo, a SFSU spokesperson. "All labor negotiations are handled centrally at the CSU Chancellor's office, and we remain hopeful that the CSU reaches an agreement with the CFA as they have done with other unions." Faculty at CSU Los Angeles and Sacramento State are expected to strike Wednesday and Thursday, respectively.

## **Thursday, December 14, 2023**

### **Oakland Unified faces tough budget decisions for future school years with \$33 million shortfall**

The Oakland Unified School District faces a \$33 million budget shortfall for the next school year. A lot of that money will be covered by state and federal grants, but the district plans to adjust its budget to limit that shortfall as much as possible. On Thursday, the school board will meet in a special session to discuss the upcoming budget issues. They say rising infrastructure costs, health insurance, and now a new union agreement with the teachers will make costs go up. Enrollment continues to decline. "We want people to stay in Oakland and work in Oakland for the long-term," said Sam Davis, OUSD board member for District 1. "It does mean we have to balance our budget and it is a requirement for any district." This means possibly consolidating schools and cutting funding for certain programs. Davis says keeping some schools open with low enrollment

is not sustainable. "We had a small schools movement where we had many schools that were 350 to 400 students," he said. "But now with declining enrollment we have 11 schools in Oakland that are under 180 students each, and that is not sustainable."

One of the proposals in the meeting plans to cut site allocations. Currently it is \$60 for elementary school students, \$75 for middle, and \$100 for high school. If passed, the new allocations would be \$50 for elementary, \$65 for middle, and \$80 for high school students. Taking money away leaves some who work for the district worried necessary programs will get cut. "It is like the blind leading the blind, to be honest with you," said Lawrence Williams, a para-professional with the district. "How are you going to have that type of support if you don't have the impact to help the students become better people without the money being a part of it that?" Williams helps students who need extra counseling and support. He worries his program will lose funding if the district continues to cut costs.

He understands money is tight, but he thinks important programs need to remain funded. "Just keep the programs that are important at the top of the list, because at the end of the day these are programs that are going to help these kids get through," he said. Davis says consolidating schools and programs would mean the district can allocate funds to the right channels. He says it is something the board needs to consider. "It is not just the negative impact for families when do you have to close a school. But it is the positive impact," Davis said. "When those families end up at a school that is adequately resourced and they are getting the support they need.

## Health

**Thursday, October 2, 2023**

### **CARE Court program to treat severe mental health disorders**

San Francisco will be one of the first seven counties in California to implement the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment also known as the CARE ACT. This state law is set to help individuals with mental health disorders access care and housing. Under CARE Court, a range of individuals can file a petition for someone in need to get mental health help. "CARE Court is really an opportunity to support individuals with untreated mental illness in the community and provide community based treatment," said Dr. Angelica Almeida, San Francisco's Dept. of Public Health, "CARE Court allows for a wide range of petitioners including first responders, family members, somebody who lives with an individual who is worries about them and those can get filed directly with the court."



San Francisco's Department of Public Health says the program will help them tackle mental health differently with potentially thousands on the streets qualifying. "When we look at the program, one of the criteria's that somebody has to be suffering from schizophrenia spectrum diagnosis. When we look at the population estimate, our best range estimate right now, is at roughly 1,000-2,000 in San Francisco may meet the criteria," said Dr. Almeida. Even though participation in the program is voluntary, judges have a strong influence. Tal Klement, Deputy for the San Francisco Public Defender's office Mental Health Unit said they are preparing to represent many in court.

"It's voluntary in that the court cannot force you to take medications or put you into a locked facility but you are still having to come to court. The court is still going to order a treatment plan for you. So there is that aspect of it that can be somewhat coercive," said Klement, and added, "If you are not successful in CARE Court. It can be used in future proceedings to put you into a locked facility and conserve you. Make you a conserved person." The Mental Health Association of San Francisco opposes CARE Court. "Seventy-five percent of folks who are approach who have serious mental health illness about assisted outpatient treatment are more than willing to participate in some type of assisted outpatient treatment and forced treatment is basically taking folks civil liberties away. Forcing them to do things they may not understand," said Erik Henriques, director of peer services for the Mental Health Association of San Francisco.

San Francisco has about 2,500 mental health and substance use disorder treatment beds and are adding more but mental health advocates say that's not enough. "There is only a few hospitals in the city that do have psychiatric hospital beds. There is really not that many for all the need that may be out there," said Henriques. The court can fine the city and county if they don't provide the necessary help and beds for people who need services. The CARE Act was passed by the State Legislature and signed by Governor Gavin Newsom a year ago. It goes into effect in October.

### **Tuesday, October 24, 2023**

#### **COVID vaccines costing up to \$140 without insurance; hundreds in SF line up for free shot**

While it's the season to get your COVID-19 booster, many uninsured people are finding it's a lot harder to get the shot this year. What used to be free, is now costing over a hundred dollars. Over the weekend, hundreds of people waited in line in San Francisco's Mission District to get their free COVID-19 booster shots on 24th Street. Only 200 made it to the front the line successfully. "We turned over 300 people away this weekend from getting the vaccine. Definitely the need and demand is there - unfortunately the supply is what we don't have," said Susana Rojas, spokesperson for Unidos en Salud.

Reality is that now COVID-19 vaccines are not as accessible for people without insurance. This year's booster can cost \$130 to \$140. "Is this capitalism or is this everything gone array because to be honest, I don't know why they are that expensive. With the investments these companies have received from tax payer dollars to develop the vaccines through Operation Warp Speed and beyond that - we should not have them be this expensive," said Dr. Monica Gandhi, UCSF Infectious Diseases. According to Dr. Gandhi's research, at this point these vaccines are not costing much to make.

"Something like \$25 per shot, so this is quite a price hike. Five times higher," said Dr. Gandhi. At Mission Wellness Pharmacy, the owner is noticing firsthand the setbacks many are facing now. "Some of the limitations would be - if their insurance would allow them to get the vaccine here; if a patient is insured, can they come to Mission Wellness to get the vaccine?," said Maria Lopez, Owner of Mission Wellness Pharmacy. "Some insurances require their patients to go to certain places."

We met Odera Okafor waiting in line for her COVID booster appointment at Walgreens. She was shocked to learn of the current price and was concerned of the equity aspect of it. "I did not know about the price if you didn't have health insurance. I think that is a little wild," said Okafor. If you don't have insurance, the federal Bridge Access Program provides no-cost COVID-19 vaccines, but not all pharmacies participate in this program. Dr. Gandhi is concerned not many know of this option. "When they ended the public health emergency on May 11, 2024, there was a promise made by this administration that we would have ongoing access until Sept. 2024 to vaccinate for under and uninsured patients," said Dr. Gandhi, "It's not always being honored and I'm really worried about that for uninsured patients." Dr. Gandhi broke down who should get vaccinated, "The WHO and most of the organizations are saying those who are older, those on immune suppressants and those with multiple comorbidities. I would encourage those groups to get vaccine."

### **Wednesday, November 1, 2023**

#### **New mask mandates begin at Bay Area hospitals in attempt to prevent another 'triple-demic'**

If you walk into a doctor's office or hospital in much of the Bay Area, you'll notice every staff member must have a mask on starting November 1. Bay Area public health officials are hoping to prevent the same 'triple-demic' that put a strain on hospitals across the area last year. "This situation right now with RSV and other viruses, respiratory viruses is basically our March 2020 -- this is our pandemic," Dr. Jackie Grupp-Phelan, division chief of Pediatric Emergency Medicine at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals said in an interview with ABC7 in November 2022.

That was last November in the Bay Area, when the 'triple-demic' of RSV, COVID, and flu pushed healthcare workers to the limits. It forced at least one hospital to expand into tents on the sidewalk outside. But many Bay Area counties are taking measures now to stop history from repeating itself. "The order in Santa Clara County does require masking for everyone who steps into a health care facility," Dr. Sarah Rudman, Santa Clara County's Deputy Health Officer said. "And that's because we're all at risk during this winter virus season. We all need to play a role in protecting ourselves and protecting each other." Starting on Wednesday, Santa Clara County will see the biggest change. Patients, caregivers and healthcare providers are now required to mask up inside of hospitals, clinics and long-term care facilities.

But in Alameda, San Mateo, Contra Costa and Sonoma Counties, it's just the healthcare workers and not patients, required to mask up. That's the same mandate San Francisco has been following all along. "To be completely honest and open, part of it is the incredible pushback on mask mandates," Dr. Karen Smith, Sonoma County's Interim Health Officer said. Smith says the population they're most trying to protect are those vulnerable patients.

"The highest risk that they have when they come into a health care facility is actually from the health care provider, because that's who they're dealing with in an enclosed room close to each other or if they're already in the hospital or, you know, they're already in a state that makes them a little higher at risk," she said. Healthcare officials are still urging everyone to get their COVID and flu shots. And now, an RSV vaccine is available to vulnerable groups too, including pregnant people nearing their due date.

"Because getting vaccinated when you're pregnant passes immunity to your baby when it's born and helps it be protected during that most vulnerable period right after birth," Rudman said. "In addition, we have vaccines available for people who are 60 and older." Sonoma County public health officials said they may choose to update their mask mandate later on, in the event that another surge puts a strain on ICU beds available across the county. The mask mandates inside of hospitals and skilled nursing facilities are expected to last for five months, through the end of March.

### **Wednesday, November 1, 2023**

#### **San Mateo County schools' drinking water contaminated with nitrate**

Drinking water is contaminated with nitrate at two San Mateo County schools. It's a decades-old problem that resurfaced in a local science classroom. "It's horrible looking right now," said Cullen Rose, the high school science teacher. "I knew just looking at it, I can't drink this." Pescadero Middle and High School has periodically seen high levels of nitrate for decades. It's a fertilizer chemical that's known to contaminate drinking water in agricultural areas. Because of the chemical, the school's drinking faucets are shut off and students have relied on

shipments of bottled water for the past 25 years. But recently, teachers say those shipments have been unreliable.

Nitrate ... you can't taste it, smell it, or even see it in the water. But according to the Environmental Protection Agency, consuming too much can reduce the ability of blood to carry oxygen, which can turn your skin blue, cause cancer, and in some cases even be deadly. "It's disgusting," said San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller. "It's contaminated not only with nitrates but with magnesium oxidation." According to the EPA, you can't see nitrate in water but when mixed or contaminated with other chemicals or compounds, the water looks dirty. "It's like yellow-brown," said student Jessica Garcia. "It's uncomfortable to see that when you wash your hands."

The picture below was taken in October after a beaker was filled with water from the faucet in the high school science classroom. The water supply problem "Since we can't drink our water from the sink, we have a water station in every classroom," said Garcia. "But, sometimes we run out of water." When asked how often, Garcia said "too many times." Greg Virgallito is the school's physical education teacher. He says it happens more than it should, usually on hot days. "Deliveries can be spotty, we often run out," said Virgallito. "It can be cause for a real possible health situation."

How Pescadero stands out: ABC7's analysis of [state drinking water data](#) found Pescadero Middle and High School are the only schools in the county to have nitrate failure as of right now, according to the state Division of Drinking Water, which identifies failing and at-risk water systems in the community and at K-12 non-transient, non-community schools. Across the region, three other areas also failed - including Twin Valley, Inc. in Morgan Hill, Valley Ford Water Association in Valley Ford and the Robin Way Water System in Santa Rosa. In Pescadero, the district says the latest water test from Oct. 12 showed 5.3 milligrams of nitrate per liter with no bacteria. The superintendent Amy Wooliever told the I-Team bacteria has not been detected in the water in the past and samples are taken from the school taps.

But earlier this month, Cullen Rose, the high school science teacher says experiments by students found higher rates of bacteria washing their hands using the school water than without. "What we found in our results is that a hand sanitizer was much better at cleaning the bacteria off our hands than the school water here," Rose said. "Whereas, when we did our research beforehand, washing your hands with soap and water should be more effective than hand sanitizer." According to Rose, students came to the conclusion that's due to the water. Some of the students raising concern that the water may be adding bacteria onto their hands. "They deserve better," Rose said. Students told the I-Team they see evidence of the problem from the toilet to the faucet.

Teachers told the I-Team the water is even too toxic for the plants. "It will just kill the plants because the amount of sediment in it," said Rose. Video taken by the I-team on Oct. 26 shows muggy water from the school faucets next to clean bottled water. According to documents obtained by the I-Team, nitrate levels began exceeding the maximum state and federal limit in February 2014 when one well was measured at 14 milligrams per liter. That's 40% over the legal limit of 10 milligrams per liter. The nitrate limit was exceeded again in December 2014, October 2015, and several times in 2017. From then on the district has been required to test for nitrate and bacteria on a monthly basis. The district says they also test for lead and copper every year and complete a series of 30 to 40 other tests every three years.

The proposed solution: The county has been discussing plans to connect clean water to Pescadero Middle and High School since 2020. It involves relocating a local fire station with maintenance of an underground water line to be able to source clean water to the school. It's called the Fire Station 59 Relocation Project. Supervisor Mueller says the project has hit a big roadblock: a regulation imposed on the county to preserve agricultural land. "Well, it's frustrating as a new county supervisor," said Mueller. "I've been on the job 10 months and to be hearing from constituents what's holding this project up - is a regulation that's being imposed on the county that we can't meet."

According to Mueller, the California Coastal Commission oversees development in this area and requested the county implement a two to one land replacement where the new fire station would go, which is approximately 3.5 acres. Among other things, he says the commission requires it be prime agricultural land and that land be relocated within a reasonable distance of the existing site. "So it's exceedingly difficult," Mueller said. "And for two years, the county hasn't been able to meet that requirement." But, not everyone agrees moving the fire station is the right solution.

"We need to really look at our finances and how spending can be done efficiently and effectively," said Pescadero resident, Bridget Jett. "I think that the firehouse where it is, is a good place. And the firemen deserve to have an excellent state of the art facility. And I think we could do that at the existing location." BJ Burns, the president of the San Mateo County Farm Bureau, agrees. He's also the owner of Bianchi Flowers Ranch right across the street from the school grounds. "It just doesn't make sense," said Burns. "You don't need to move a firehouse to get the water." Burns told the I-Team he wants the project to be researched more before millions of taxpayer dollars are spent.

"Well, I've heard it will cost up to \$12 million just to move a firehouse out here," said Burns. "And I've heard it will cost between \$5 million to \$6 million to bring out a water line. And to me, that's just a waste of money, especially when the location of the fire department right now is in the right place." According to the district, in 2019 the county drilled for a new water well, but it did not have

sufficient flow to support the school. Four years later, students still don't have clean running water.

### **Friday, November 3, 2023**

### **TB testing recommended for any visitors of East Bay casino since 2018, health department says**

Contra Costa County public health officials are advising anyone who has spent time inside California Grand Casino in Pacheco since 2018 to consider getting a tuberculosis test after several related cases were recently revealed among staff and customers there. "We're using this opportunity to spread information to those who might have been exposed so that they are able to access resources for testing and know what to do for the next steps to keep themselves healthy," County Deputy Health Officer Dr. Meera Sreenivasan said. Contra Costa Health on Thursday said recent genetic testing revealed several linked cases among 11 confirmed TB cases, and the majority of them are associated with the casino located on Pacheco Boulevard. County health officials say tuberculosis can live inside someone's body for months or years without causing any symptoms, but that symptoms of active TB include a persistent or bloody cough, fever, weight loss, night sweats and fatigue.

The health department has not identified a current source of TB transmission but is advising anyone who has visited the casino over the past five years to get tested. "We are making this recommendation now because there is new evidence that TB may have spread among people who spent time at the casino from 2018 to 2023," Sreenivasan said. "TB can cause serious illness, but it is treatable and curable with medicine, especially when caught early." The county has contacted more than 300 people who may have been exposed to active TB and is working with the casino to provide education to staff and to encourage testing.

"Overall risk in the community is low, but there are individuals who can become contagious and in an appropriate setting, which is an indoor setting, it does become easier for them to spread it to others," Sreenivasan said. The casino is on a busy street in Pacheco, and several people tell us it's a place where the community comes together. Because of that, a lot of the folks we talked to say they have concerns about the tuberculosis cases. That includes Juan Gonzalez - who says he's been inside the casino several times over the past few years. "I go in there to buy food, and the last time I was in there was about two weeks ago," he said.

Gonzalez says while he doesn't know much about tuberculosis, he wants to follow the official advice and get tested. "That's news to me. I guess I should follow up with that then," Gonzalez said. Others tell us they haven't been inside the casino for a while. And for some, they plan to keep it that way. "I wouldn't go in there any time soon, that's for sure," said nearby resident Stewart. California

Grand Casino spokesperson Becky Warren said in a statement, "Our foremost commitment is to ensure the safety of our customers and employees. According to Contra Costa Health, none of the linked cases are currently contagious, nor do they involve our staff. Additionally, Contra Costa Health has not identified any ongoing sources of transmission at the card room. We are actively collaborating with the county on notifications and testing to uphold public health and safety." Health officials want anyone who has visited the casino, even if they're not showing symptoms, to test as well. "We're strongly stressing that early detection of TB is very beneficial," Contra Costa Health Communicable Disease Program Chief Paul Leung said. "A latent TB infection is easier to treat and takes less time compared to active TB disease."

### **Saturday, November 18, 2023**

#### **'Hey Marin: WTF?': North Bay county starts new fentanyl awareness campaign to combat opioid crisis**

A new campaign is targeting the dangers of fentanyl in Marin County. This as President Joe Biden met with Mexico's president on the last day of APEC to talk about the Fentanyl crisis facing the two countries. In the North Bay, a new eye-catching ad campaign is targeting the dangers of Fentanyl in Marin County. This is as President Joe Biden met with Mexico's president on the last day of APEC to talk about the Fentanyl crisis facing the two countries. Officials are hoping the new campaign helps bring awareness to the situation.

It's a new eye-catching ad campaign, which asks the question, "Hey Marin: WTF? Where's The Fentanyl?" The answer is everywhere. "It happens from mansions to encampments and everywhere in between," said Anita Renzetti from OD Free Marin. Renzetti says the new campaign, appearing online and in person, was launched by nonprofits and Marin County. It's designed to be big, bold and provocative to help break the myth that fentanyl isn't a problem here. "We're trying to reduce the stigma around addiction and substance abuse. If we don't do that, we can't tackle this. Parents are like, 'That would never be my kid,'" Renzetti said.

"I think that's why it's red. We want to stop and look at the campaign," said Lucia Ramirez from Marin Health and Human Services Ramirez helped produce videos targeting young people. Some clips challenge young people to spot a real pill from one laced with fentanyl. County officials say accidental overdoses kill someone every nine days in Marin. On average, overdose has become the leading cause of death for people aged 55 and under. "We want people to be aware and start using Narcan," Ramirez said. OD Free Marin provides free Narcan spray to reverse the effects of fentanyl. On Friday, Biden and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador talked about the fentanyl crisis facing both countries at the APEC summit. Ramirez believes high-profile chats like this will help raise awareness. "I think the issue will persist if we don't start talking about it, and that's step one," she said. Calling out a killer is the next goal.

**Tuesday, November 21, 2023**

**Santa Clara Co. doctors see increase in RSV wastewater numbers ahead of Thanksgiving**

Ahead of holiday gatherings and Thanksgiving meals, Santa Clara County doctors are urging caution because RSV is on the rise in the county. Santa Clara County health leaders say an already busy flu and COVID season is getting even busier with a rise in Respiratory Syncytial Virus. "What we saw last year and so far what we're seeing this year is a peak first in RSV, then a peak in flu and then a peak in COVID," Santa Clara County Public Health communicable disease controller and asst. health officer Dr. Monika Roy said. "So, we're going to be monitoring. That's part of what we do here at the public health department. But so far, it does look like RSV is probably going to peak first."

Wastewater monitoring data backs that up. Santa Clara County is the leader in community detection for a number of illnesses and diseases, including RSV. In the last month, the wastewater has shown double the amount of RSV in San Jose. In the Palo Alto, Sunnyvale and Gilroy sewersheds, it has doubled in the last week. "RSV affects everybody and every age in our community," Dr. Roy said. "And we know that the more RSV there is in the community, it then is going to spread to and put those young infants at risk." Babies younger than one and people older than 60 are most vulnerable to serious complications from the virus and a new RSV specific vaccine aims to help them. It's found to reduce an infant's risk of hospitalization from RSV by 57%. Dr. Roy says despite a shortage of infant vaccines, there is a recommendation for expected mothers to protect their children without waiting to get them vaccinated after birth.

"The idea is that weeks 32 to 36 the mother gets vaccinated, she develops antibodies, those get passed on to her infant and so that baby is now protected during this fall/winter RSV season," Dr. Roy said. In addition to the RSV vaccine, Dr. Roy says an increase in emergency visits for influenza-like illnesses means it's important for everyone to get updated COVID and flu shots as well. Of course, she always says to don't forget proper cold and flu season practices. "To stay safe during this Thanksgiving holiday, wash your hands, cough in your elbow, mask up if you're going to be around a lot of people indoors and stay home if you're sick," Dr. Roy said.

**Thursday, November 30, 2023**

**SF searches for answers as it faces deadliest year of drug overdose crisis**

The sounds of sirens ring throughout the heart of San Francisco's Tenderloin District, ground zero in the city's battle against the fentanyl crisis. "I mean it's a hard drug to beat. It's fentanyl. It's crazy," said one drug user, outside a tent he calls home. From fentanyl to meth, "tranq" and more, the drug supply is



becoming increasingly unpredictable. A man named Michael, hanging out on Market Street, says he sells and uses.

TAKE ACTION SF: Mayor, city leaders to answer questions about future of city

TARA CAMPBELL: "Most people who are buying, what are they looking for?"

MICHAEL: "They looking for like fentanyl -- fentanyl gets you feeling good."

And, Michael says it's cheap and easy to get.

MICHAEL: "They might want something for five bucks."

TARA CAMPBELL: "How much do you get for \$5?"

MICHAEL: "You know, a nice amount."

San Francisco is on pace for its deadliest year yet amid the drug overdose crisis. The Chief Medical Examiner has recorded 692 accidental overdose deaths so far this year, the majority caused by fentanyl. To combat the crisis, the city set aside nearly \$600 million for behavioral health services in the past fiscal year, with the money going towards everything from more treatment beds to the street crisis team. The city's also working to get life-saving Naloxone Spray, or Narcan into more hands, doling out more than 70,000 doses so far this year. "I'm going to give you this, okay," said Sheriff's Deputy Barry Bloom, just a block away from City Hall, where he administered Narcan to a woman. And, back in the Tenderloin another life is saved, which is exactly why a group of activists set up a pop-up safe consumption site earlier this year.

"What we're doing here today is showing how easy it is to save a life," said Lydia Bransten, executive director of The Gubbio Project. "We're not putting anyone at risk, including ourselves," said Richard, who is fighting addiction to fentanyl. "It would be nice if I could be here for more than just a day. I don't know what it's going to take." The city's been hesitant to green light safe consumption sites, citing legal concerns. But, the mayor has signaled support for the New York model, where a local nonprofit is funding and operating three sites.

And, as local leaders look to New York City for solutions, Los Angeles is turning its eyes to San Francisco. "One of the things I appreciate about what San Francisco's been doing in recent months, is that shift to focusing on especially the folks who are manufacturing this poison that's killing people on the streets," said Los Angeles Councilwoman Traci Park, who took to the streets of San Francisco. The city is now more than six months into a multi-agency effort to shutter the open-air drug market. Gov. Gavin Newsom sent in California Highway Patrol and National Guard to support police.

But some say the city's gone too far -- from arresting drug users to the mayor's proposal to drug test welfare recipients -- moves the mayor defended in a recent interview with ABC's Martha Raddatz. "No, it's not always the popular thing to do and this is not about "left " or "right. " This is about saving lives," said Mayor London Breed. And back on the streets, there is a stark reminder of the struggle to get sober. "Myself, if you test me, I will be clean and might be dirty," said

Denise, who was on the streets of the Mission District. "I go days and I do, and I go days that I don't." And on one of those days when Denise did use, it was her last; just weeks after ABC7 News Reporter Tara Campbell spoke with her, Denise died of a fentanyl overdose.

### **Friday, December 1, 2023**

#### **Latinos disproportionately impacted by HIV in Santa Clara Co., data shows**

Santa Clara County's Public Health Department marked World AIDS Day with a vigil at the AIDS Commemorative Grove in Guadalupe River Park. Officials say while great strides are being made against HIV and AIDS, some 35,000 people become infected in the US each year. A flag raising at the Santa Clara County Administrative building was also held later in the afternoon "We not only remember those who've lost their lives to AIDS but really honor and celebrate those who fought to get us where we are today," said Dr. Akansha Vaidya, assistant public health officer and HIV/STI controller for the county of Santa Clara Public Health. World AIDS Day: Marty's Place gives hope to those living with HIV

Where we are today is a long way from where we were years ago, like in 1982, the year David Morse became positive with HIV. Treatments available today have allowed him to live normally. "Now people are living undetectable, untransmittable for normal lifespans. I mean, it can't get a lot better than that," Morse said before quickly adding. "Well, it can get better if we get rid of the disease, but we're getting close to having things be as normal as they can. "Yet, in some ways, experts say we're still a long way from where we can be. The county's public health department said 3,770 people are living with HIV in Santa Clara County as of the most recent data available in 2022. The department said that, like many other diseases and health conditions, HIV data show racial inequities, especially for one demographic.

"Last year in 2022, we had 165 new HIV diagnosis in the county. Sixty percent of these were among Hispanic and Latino community," Vaidya said. "There could be a variety of reasons why we're seeing that but probably one of the main reasons is lack of access to care because of cost or insurance purposes." That demographic isn't just being disproportionately impacted in Santa Clara County. It's seen throughout the Bay Area and nationally according to U.S. statistics. Dr. Maria Lopez is a pharmacist and president of Mission Wellness Pharmacy in San Francisco. In addition to insurance purposes, she says the disproportionate numbers can be traced to education access.

"HIV prevention, what patients can do, or individuals can do to prevent and protect themselves from acquiring HIV," Lopez said. Lopez has been part of work that's increased education and resources throughout the state. Mission Wellness was the first pharmacy in California to provide medications that prevent HIV, like PREP, directly to community members. "This is a demonstration project that was started in San Francisco with the health department and our site, and has led to

a state bill and a national model that has been expanded in other states," she said. Even with the advancements made, public health officials are fast to point out that there is still more work ahead. "World AIDS Day reminds us that the fight is not over," Vaidya said. "And we really need to work with the community break barriers to access to testing and treatment."

### **Friday, December 8, 2023**

### **COVID-19 hospitalizations are increasing in US, rates are highest among oldest and youngest**

For nearly a month, COVID-19 hospitalizations have been increasing following weeks of decline and relatively low levels throughout the summer, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As of Nov. 25, there were 19,444 weekly hospitalizations due to the virus compared to 15,006 four weeks earlier, data shows. The video is from a previous report. While this marks an increase of 29.6%, it is lower than the 150,650 weekly hospitalizations at the peak of the omicron wave during the 2021-22 season. Rates of COVID hospitalizations remain elevated among senior citizens, middle-aged adults and children under age 4, meaning the virus is affecting both the oldest and youngest Americans. "COVID has not disappeared, although it may have gone from many people's minds and the top of their attention,"

Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, told ABC News. "I'm afraid the COVID virus is still very much with us." He added, "These omicron variants and subvariants are highly contagious. They're causing lots of milder illness that does not require hospitalizations. However, there are substantial hospitalizations across the country." Vaccine protection waning among seniors Americans aged 65 and older have the highest rate of weekly hospitalizations of any age group in the U.S., as they have throughout the pandemic, at 13.5% per 100,000 for the week ending Dec. 2, CDC data shows.

Experts said there are multiple reasons for this age group to have high rates of hospitalizations, including age being a risk factor for severe disease and senior citizens having more chronic underlying medical conditions that raise the risk of severe disease. Another reason is vaccine uptake and waning immunity. While 94.4% of adults aged 65 and older completed a primary series of the original vaccine, 33.3% of adults aged 65 and older have received the updated vaccine, according to CDC data.

"Many people, although they have been vaccinated in the past, have not taken advantage of this updated vaccine," Schaffner said. "And the protection afforded by the previous vaccinations is now slowly declining. And so, we have a highly vulnerable population whose protection is slowly waning." Those aged 50 to 64 have the second-highest rate of weekly hospitalizations by age group at 2.7% per 100,000. Experts said, similarly, this is a group that is starting to see the

emergence of chronic underlying conditions that raise the risk of severe illness from COVID. Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, a professor of medicine and an infectious diseases expert at the University of California, San Francisco, said another reason middle-aged and older Americans have higher rates of hospitalization is that the most vulnerable among this group are not receiving treatments like Paxlovid. Reports have suggested that in some states, it's prescribed in less than 25% of cases. "It represents a failure of our system to intervene and provide early therapy," Chin-Hong. "You can't really just blame vaccinations because there's a get out of jail card, which is Paxlovid and even remdesivir."

While only those at risk of severe illness are recommended to take Paxlovid, Chin-Hong said it's been a relatively underused treatment because some may feel they don't need the drug or doctors may feel hesitant to prescribe it due to concerns about how the medication interacts with other prescription drugs. There's also some confusion about who pays for Paxlovid, Chin-Hong said. While it has been and will continue to be free through 2024 for people with Medicare or Medicaid, people with private insurance may have co-pays associated with the drug now that it will no longer be purchased and distributed by the government.

Young kids also at risk of severe illness Infants and young children under age 4 have the third-highest rate of hospitalizations by age group at 1.6% per 100,000 for the week ending Dec. 2, CDC data shows. Although children are less likely to fall severely ill and die from COVID compared to adults, they can get sick enough to be hospitalized. Schaffner said it's a fallacy for a parent to think their child does not need to get vaccinated because they are relatively healthy because children can fall severely ill. What's more, studies have shown that COVID vaccines do decrease hospitalizations among kids. "It has been very difficult for people to keep two apparently conflicting notions in their mind at the same time," Schaffner said. "First, everyone knows that children are less apt to be seriously affected by COVID infections than older adults. The alternate concept that is hard for parents to grasp is that nonetheless, young children account for the third most common age group with hospitalizations."

Chin-Hong said that parents are less hesitant to get their children vaccinated against influenza than against COVID-19. As of Nov. 18, 38.2% of children aged 6 months to 17 years have gotten a flu shot, CDC data shows. Comparatively, 6.9% of children have gotten an updated COVID vaccine as of Nov. 25. "More than double are getting flu shots," he said. "So, it's not that everybody's saying, 'No' to vaccines. They're being selective." While COVID has not followed a traditional seasonal trend like flu, experts say that for all age groups, increases in hospitalizations have occurred during the colder months when people begin to stay indoors, heat is turned up, windows are closed, and holiday gatherings people bring people together -- "ideal conditions for respiratory viruses to spread," said Dr. John Brownstein, an epidemiologist and chief innovation officer at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor.

"As people gather for the holidays, it's crucial to remain vigilant about COVID-19, especially in protecting vulnerable populations like the elderly and infants," Brownstein continued. "Practicing good hygiene, such as regular hand washing, and staying home if feeling unwell are key. Additionally, ensuring proper ventilation in indoor spaces and considering wearing masks in crowded settings can significantly reduce the risk of transmission." The experts also advised the importance of staying up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations and said it's not too late to get a shot. "Seriously, make a plan and do it as quickly as possible," Schaffner said. "Getting yourself vaccinated and making sure your family members are vaccinated, that's without a doubt -- and I mean, this sincerely -- the best present, you can give yourself and give to them this holiday season, and you will help also make your neighborhood and your community safer."

## **Climate & Environment**

**Tuesday, October 24, 2023**

### **Strategic management helps protect redwoods from future wildfires in Santa Cruz Mountains**

For Susie Petrie, a senior project manager with the Peninsula Open Space Trust, walking pathways into the San Vicente Redwoods is like following a wildfire roadmap. The charred tree tops mark the twists and turns of the ferocious CZU blaze that roared through the Santa Cruz Mountains three years ago. "So, the Doug fir, the Coulter pine that was here, all cooked," Petrie said, pointing to the wildfire damage. "So we don't have any live trees left in these areas. And you can see because these trees are dead, they don't have leaves anymore, exposing the surface, the ground surface to a lot of sunlight." And beyond the destruction, the CZU fire has also brought profound changes to San Vicente. Petrie, says the disaster has accelerated growth along the forest floor. Native plants are regenerating and recreating habitats for wildlife. "So it's a really unique opportunity for people who are visiting to come see how fire changed the landscape and how it's progressing over time," Petrie said. "The plant and animal community around us is evolved and adapted for this type of disturbance, this type of fire, and it's humans now that are trying to catch up and respond."

To prepare for future wildfire threats, managers at San Vicente have concentrated on balancing the forest itself, clearing out dead trees to strategically thin certain areas. And since the CZU fire, crews have also worked to create what's known as shaded fuel breaks. "Those typically are a way to reduce the fuel load in the understory. So a lot of the kind of smaller brush and smaller plants, clearing those out, while leaving what's left of the healthy, intact canopy above to shade out those areas, keep things cool, slow down the regrowth of species and still provide those kinds of habitat benefits for birds, insects and everything in between," explains Ian Rowbotham, a senior land manager with the

Sempervirens Fund, which shares management responsibilities for San Vicente. The shaded fuel break work at San Vicente Redwoods is paid for through grants from CAL FIRE, California Coastal Conservancy, and Department of Conservation.

This fall, the team is planning to employ yet another forest management technique, a prescribed burn, to further reduce the fuel load. "So one of the key goals with prescribed burning is you're trying to thin out a lot of that understory growth with the fire," Rowbotham said. "So it's really a low intensity burn where you're trying to not only reduce the fuel loading on the landscape, but also open up growing space for all sorts of species." Back on the trail, hikers can see the evidence of the technique's effectiveness. Areas that were thinned by controlled burns before the 2020 CZU stand in lush contrast to stands of blackened trees just a few hundred feet away. "But what we see is that the after effects in this area, we did a burn, look really good," Petrie said. "The fire stayed at a low enough intensity not to kill these trees." And with a newly marked trail system, San Vicente is offering even first time visitors the chance to experience a changing landscape, and perhaps a new reality in the Santa Cruz Mountains, of learning to live with fire.

### **Friday, October 27, 2023**

#### **Here's how climate change is playing a factor in family planning decisions**

Deciding to start a family and have a child is an incredibly emotional and serious conversation between partners. Factors involving economics and health play a key role but there's a growing opinion that climate change plays a role as well. The climate crisis is affecting the way people make decisions every day. These can be routine daily choices about what groceries to buy, or more complex considerations, like where to live or work. But now, more people are even factoring in climate change when planning their families. "Folks are either choosing not to have children or having fewer children than they consider ideal in large part because of climate change," said CSU East Bay Assistant Professor of Sociology Amara Miller. "So, while there are other factors, climate change is a growing reason why."

It's turning into a global opinion. This year, Hewlett Packard asked 5,000 people how climate change impacts their decisions. Of those surveyed, 91% said they have anxiety about the climate and 53% percent of that group said climate has impacted their perspective on having more children or any at all. "This trend of folks having fewer kids than they would like to or not having kids at all when they would ideally like to have children, I think it's a sign of how dire the climate change situation is," Miller said. Miller says many parents say they simply don't want their children growing up in a world of natural disasters caused by climate change.

But others, including Kristen Weaver, say their decision comes from climate experts suggesting having fewer kids than originally planned can help combat climate issues. "I originally anticipated that I might have two or three, and I ultimately decided to have one," Weaver said. "There were a number of factors that played into that -- it wasn't just climate change. But, seeing that information really confirmed my decision to just have one child." "The fact that anyone is making a decision not to have children because of climate change or having fewer children is very heartbreaking," Miller said. "I hope it spurs some action at these global levels, both among governments and corporations. Because it doesn't have to be this way."

### **Tuesday, November 7, 2023**

#### **Stanford researchers propose string of small marine sanctuaries to combat climate change**

The stunning marine sanctuaries that dot the California coast are critical for the continued health of ocean species, areas like the Gulf of the Farallones, Cordell Bank, and Monterey Bay. But if we can think of them as massive cities in the sea, new research suggests we may also need something smaller in the future. Maybe closer to a string of Airbnb's. "For conservation because species are moving from these areas. Larvae are drifting through ocean currents," says Dr. Nur Arafah-Dalmau, Ph.D., a marine conservation scientist with Stanford's Doerr School of Sustainability.

His work has included documenting a severe marine heat wave off the coast of Mexico. The kind of event that can both threaten marine habitats and push species to migrate. "And you know, as climate change is happening, species are moving, they're kind of shifting a little bit their distribution," he said. Researchers have noted examples of the changes in recent years, including the unexpected appearance of juvenile great white sharks in Monterey Bay, much further north than their normal nursery habitat off Southern California. A similar northward migration by the predatory California Market Squid impacted salmon populations in the Gulf of Alaska. Fellow Stanford Doerr researcher Larry Crowder, Ph.D. studies marine food chains.

"Well, one thing that's very clear, is that the data show that marine animals are moving poleward in the northern hemisphere, to the north, and in the southern hemisphere to the south. And that's thought to be related to long-term trends and climate," Dr. Crowder notes. In this most recent study the Stanford team identified areas off the coast of California and Mexico that might act as safe zones, many containing healthy kelp forests or other habitats. "We have this amazing data set in California, but also in Mexico, based on satellite that maps kelp forest in the past 40 years. So there are places that the satellite always detect that the kelp is there," says Arafah-Dalmau. The goal now is to possibly turn the areas into an international string of migration sanctuaries. A pathway, where species on the move could essentially check-in and check-out as they

adjust to changes and fluctuations brought by climate change. The Stanford team has now published their results. They've also included specific guidelines for world governments, to help them create protected migration stopovers along coastal corridors.

### **Friday, November 10, 2023**

#### **SF-based company opens 1st commercial facility to remove carbon dioxide from air**

By using the slightest of breeze in the Central Valley, a San Francisco-based company can remove harmful CO<sub>2</sub> from the air. We visited the country's first commercial direct air capture carbon dioxide removal facility in Tracy. In an area with some of the worst air pollution in the state, this technology is pushing California towards net-zero. "This facility is the closest thing to a time machine because it can turn back the clock on climate change," Heirloom CEO and co-founder Shashank Samala said. "We've been polluting, with carbon, our atmosphere, since the industrial revolution and you cannot unpollute - except, except with this," U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm said. We were on hand for a tour of the San Francisco-based company's facility. Heirloom's direct air capture tech uses chemical reactions from limestone known as calcium hydroxide to remove one thousand tons of harmful CO<sub>2</sub> per year to provide cleaner breathing.

"We've identified a few different ways, non-toxic, very low cost, very low energy-use ways to substantially accelerate the rate that calcium hydroxide naturally takes up CO<sub>2</sub>," Heirloom head of commercialization Max Scholten said. Here's how it works: as the wind blows through, CO<sub>2</sub> binds to limestone in stacked sheets. Once robots have determined enough CO<sub>2</sub> has been collected, they're brought to an all-electric kiln where the carbon dioxide is burnt off. It's eventually stored in concrete by CarbonCure Technologies to be used in Bay Area construction projects. The tons of CO<sub>2</sub> can now no longer harm the atmosphere. "We are aiming for many, many millions of tons this decade, hundreds of millions and then billions to the next decade as well," Scholten said.

It's a start, but in order to reach President Joe Biden's and Governor Gavin Newsom's goals of net-zero, billions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> needs to be removed from the air annually. The goal is to scale the technology to \$100 spent per one ton of removed carbon dioxide in the hopes of a cleaner world for tomorrow. "This may be the first DAC facility in America, but it cannot be the last and it won't be the last," Samala said. We'll build many more like it, across America, across the planet to remove millions to billions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> to meet our generational duty to slow, stop and eventually reverse climate change."

### **Thursday, November 16, 2023**

#### **As wildfire risk increases in Bay Area, communities are building back better with new technology**



For many people in California, memories of recent wildfires are vivid and painful. The same can be said for construction consultant Ed Nessinger, who can recreate the terrifying moments from recent wildfires in Sonoma County in chilling detail. "So the last Tubbs fire, I was here at home. The glow got brighter. And then the wind kicked up slightly," Nessinger said. "And then I started taking a sequence of pictures and within, let's say, a two, two-and-a-half-hour timeframe - it virtually came from Calistoga, all the way in through Santa Rosa down into downtown in the Coffey Park." His family lost multiple homes in the fire. In the next 30 years, one out of every seven properties in the U.S. will be at a major risk for wildfires, according to an ABC7 data team analysis of data from the First Street Foundation, a nonprofit science and research group that studies climate risk data. And with wildfires increasing across the country, so is the number of homes built in high-fire-risk areas.

In the Bay Area, several counties are home to a large percentage of fire-risk areas. The Wildland Urban Interface, otherwise known as WUI, are fire-prone areas on the fringe of forests and similar landscapes. It has some of the highest wildfire threats to people and homes. Homebuilding in the WUI has increased by 25% in Sonoma County, 28% in Napa County, and 41% in Solano County from 1990 to 2020. Statewide, there has been a 40% increase during that same time period. Nessinger is helping build a new generation of homes designed to survive future wildfires, which will prevent homeowners from experiencing what his family did. "What I'm going to show you is a conventional style home that's built unconventionally," Nessinger said, while giving us a tour of a development in Windsor, near Santa Rosa. It's a hilly terrain, where luxury homes dot the same ridges that have recently burned. But the new homes are constructed with a new array of technologies, ranging from steel framing, fire-resistant roofs and venting systems designed to keep flaming embers from being sucked into the structure. "There's nowhere for the ember to get cast into," Nessinger said while showing us a home with the innovative mitigation listed above. "It would touch this larger re-sawn cedar material and not ignite."

While areas like Lake Tahoe and the wine country continue to attract high-end development, experts say the pressure to live or build in fire prone areas is often more complicated. Kimiko Barrett, a wildfire researcher with Headwaters Economics, said there are several reasons people live -- and are moving to -- these locations, including out of necessity. "For some folks, these are homes that they inherited, that they've lived in for quite a while they're multi-generational at that point," Barrett said. "Or alternatively, there's simply no other place to move into. And we know places like California, for example, do have a significant housing crunch." But after increasingly destructive cycles of wildfires linked in part to drought, forest management and climate change, the insurance market in California is unstable. From 2015 to 2021, over 600,000 policies within areas of California with a 50% or more major fire risk were not renewed by insurance companies. And several insurance companies paused writing new policies within

the state this year, making affordable policies even tougher to find. The insurance market in all areas, not just the WUI, "is as unhealthy as it's ever been, certainly in my 32-year career here in California," according to Amy Bach, co-founder and executive director for United Policyholders, a nonprofit insurance consumer advocacy group. "And if you ask any agent that's been around, they'll say, I've never seen the market conditions this bad."

Gov. Gavin Newsom issued an executive order in September for "prompt regulatory action to strengthen and stabilize California's marketplace for homeowners' insurance." This led Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara to announce several changes to the current statewide system, the largest insurance reform in California in 35 years. Bach believes changes currently being considered by state insurance regulators, while potentially helpful for enticing some insurance companies to start writing new policies in California again, could result in rising premiums in wildfire-prone areas.

Her group supports legislation to provide coverage guarantees to homeowners who build or retrofit their homes to one of two wildfire-resistant standards, including the Institute for Business & Home Safety's Wildfire Prepared Home system. IBHS runs a testing center in South Carolina, which includes powerful fans that blast burning embers toward a variety of homebuilding materials to judge their effectiveness. One test conducted saw how a common wooden fence helped flames reach the home on the left, while a metal fence gap on the right prevented it. The Wildfire Prepared Home standard lists noncombustible fencing -- so no wooden fences. It also includes specific roof types, a five-foot area around the perimeter of the home without any vegetation, ember-resistant vents, among other innovations.

Back in Sonoma County, Nessinger pointed out another home with steel construction and fire-resistant materials used from top to bottom. It's a double survivor of wildfire. "This was in construction during the Tubbs fire and then in 2019 when the Kincadee fire came through, it hadn't been landscaped yet, but the fire burnt all the way around," Nessinger said. "And we suffered no smoke damage inside the house and no exterior damage to the outside of the house." As companies race to introduce similar technologies quickly enough to protect more fire-prone areas and California is pushing policies to bring insurance companies back to the state, our future ability to live side by side with wildfire could ultimately depend not only on where we build but how.

### **Monday, November 27, 2023**

#### **Experts explain why salmon run seeing record numbers, sizes in parts of Bay Area**

Bay Area waterways are seeing incredible numbers and sizes of Chinook salmon. Some of them are being seen in areas right by homes and major roads.

The fish can be seen just under a bridge on Branham Lane in San Jose. The South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition has been tracking them in South Bay waterways for more than 10 years. ABC7 News tagged along with Steve Holmes, the coalition's founder and executive director as he worked to track down carcasses. He spotted one along the Guadalupe River. "It came in from the Pacific Ocean under the Golden Gate Bridge, it swam down to the south end of the bay," Holmes said, "For the last month, those fish were probably doing circles waiting for the right temperature and enough water so that they can move into the watershed.

As is typical, after spawning the female fish died after an estimated three-year life span. Holmes and the coalition take the heads off of the fish and send them off to UC Davis where work is done to determine where they came from. Holmes said it was once believed that fish in these urban waterways came from hatcheries, but the research they're helping is proving that many are not. "We're finding that there are fish that were born in streams, and have returned to this waterway to spawn," he said. One thing still not determined is why the fish are so much larger than in years past. "We suspect reasons such as that they closed the fishing season in past years," he said, "Or that because of global warming, we're starting to see a change in the food sources that are available."

The South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition has worked for years to clear more than 1.3 million pounds of trash from waterways. It's something fisheries biologists say could contribute to the higher number of fish. "Cleaning the stream, creating habitat for spawning fish is, is critical," said Dr. Brian Allee. Chinook salmon are being seen in other places. Just down the hill from a Campbell neighborhood, Chinook salmon can be seen splashing around in the Los Gatos Creek also digging rock nests. The East Bay Municipal Utility District reported that the Mokelumne River has seen more than 20,000 returning to spawn. Back in the South Bay, Holmes is confident that their efforts can bring even more monster sized fish to local waterways. "By doing this work, we're giving these fish a chance to start increasing in size and population," he said, "That's what we're all about."

### **Wednesday, December 6, 2023**

#### **Old landfill littering San Mateo County beach with decades of trash**

Watching the sun set over the ocean at Mussel Rock Beach, you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd found a little piece of heaven. But just under the surface of all that natural beauty is a persistent and worsening problem. Trash, and a lot of it, making its way down the bluff and towards the beach and water. "We can't treat the ocean like a supermarket and a sewer at the same time and expect no problems," said Liz Taylor. The trash issue stems from an old landfill that was in operation in the area from the 1950s to 1970s, until it was built over. Over the decades, natural erosion and other factors have slowly chipped away at the terrain exposing decades of old trash.

"The really scary thing is in many of these old landfills, we don't really know what went into them," Taylor said. Taylor is the president of Deep Ocean Exploration and Research in Alameda. She says problems with former landfills are popping up all over the country, with devastating impacts on everything from the local environment to marine life.

"It comes back to us eventually. For people that consume seafood, we're consuming plastic at an alarming rate," said Taylor. San Mateo County Supervisor David Canepa tells us local leaders are well aware of the problem. He believes that due to its massive scale, fixing it once and for all will require outside help. "The only way we're going to solve it is if we double down with federal and state dollars," Canepa said. But even with extra assistance, fixing it won't be easy. "You're talking not tens of millions of dollars. You may be talking \$150, \$200 million," said Canepa. For residents who live nearby though, they say they just want something to be done. "We want to keep the beaches clean for everyone. We want to help build our tourism and stuff like that. That's one thing that helps the community out. We've lived here all our lives and we'd like to show people, look you come to Pacifica you're not going to see trash," said Aidan Harris.

### **Wednesday, December 6, 2023**

#### **Study shows why CA redwoods are so resilient in wake of damaging wildfires**

The beautiful redwoods of Big Basin State Park may never be the same, but they still stand tall and are regrowing after the CZU Lightning Complex fires of 2020. What researchers wanted to know was: Why? They found decades-old carbon reserves and thousands of years-old buds are the reason they survived. "You know, it wasn't clear initially if they were going to survive," Biologist Drew Peltier said. "There's not really a precedent for this kind of event. You know, my first impression was that this park was destroyed. But pretty quickly, it became apparent that a lot of those trees had actually survived." Peltier and a team from the Save the Redwoods League and Northern Arizona visited the park in 2021 to study their resiliency.

They knew that some of the biggest redwoods have up to a foot thick of bark to protect the insides of the tree. And when it comes to fighting against fires, the study learned what's on the inside matters. "Trees produce sugars from photosynthesis and then they have two choices," Peltier said. "They can use it for growth or metabolism or something, or they can store it for later. They have these really old, 50-to-100-year old carbon reserves that have accumulated for many decades that they can draw upon to build new leaves and do new photosynthesis."

That's what we saw when we visited the park: new life from what some experts thought was the death of the tree. The new sprouts coming from what's known as

a "bud trace," a line that runs from inside the tree to the surface that can lead to new leaves. Peltier says in a biological anticipation of an event like the wildfires, some of these trees grew the bud traces thousands of years ago. So in some ways, the trees were actually more prepared for the fire than we were. "Yeah, and that's actually the surprise," Peltier said. "The trees, actually, they were able to survive it and able to recover. They're not going to look the same as they did in the past and it's going to be awhile. As to whether or not they'll survive, it seems like they're doing okay. But perhaps they'll be more sensitive to drought or definitely a repeat fire. So those are the things that we would hope to avoid for them." Climate change may make it harder on these trees, but we're learning they remain equipped to survive for the long haul.

### **Monday, December 11, 2023**

#### **CA coastline dotted with carbon hot spots, new study by Bay Area researchers shows**

Watching a majestic parade of whales migrating by, or discovering the stunning array of marine creatures thriving beneath the surface, it's easy to understand the urgency of protecting our Bay Area coastline. But now, researchers believe there is another powerful reason -- one that could be critical in the fight against climate change. "So I think what's most significant about the seafloor, is that it is the final resting place of carbon. It's kind of the ultimate carbon reservoir on the planet," said Sara Hutto, climate change coordinator with the Greater Farallones Association. She's also part of a research team documenting what they call "carbon hot spots."

They often muddy stretches of ocean floor where huge amounts of carbon settles, preventing it from being released into the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas. Much of the work was done at the Greater Farallones Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries. "And so this study is just one piece of that to say, hey, the seafloor holds a lot of carbon. It's constantly accumulating carbon, and a piece of our climate strategy to be should be to ensure that, that can keep taking place," Hutto said.

First, it helps to understand that even muddy areas of the sea bed are teeming with life. That marine life is also a source of the organic material -- or ocean carbon-- that ultimately settles on the seabed. And researchers argue that managing those sections of sea floor correctly could help keep that natural carbon sequestered. . "So that's certainly a conversation for decision makers," said co-author Doug George, an ocean scientist with NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

He acknowledges that coastal areas are also attractive for industries like off-shore wind farms, ocean wave power, oil drilling and off-shore mining, and that governments may need to work to strike a healthy balance. "And anything that is disturbing the seafloor is going to move that sediment potentially back up into the

water," George explains. The team is working to create a kind of blueprint to help countries around the world to identify carbon hot spots along their own coastlines and perhaps begin the process of better protecting them. "We want state agencies to take this up so that they can better understand how their decisions for the coastline and for the seafloor can be informed by where these carbon hot spots are," Hutto said. The research team is now presenting their carbon findings at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai.

### **Tuesday, December 12, 2023**

#### **Richmond hosting emergency meeting Tuesday over concerning air quality issues**

The environmental problems are stacking up in Richmond. First, several flaring events at the local Chevron refinery two weeks ago. Then last week, a petroleum smell near Chevron, as well as a heavy stench coming from the city's wastewater treatment plant. The cause was elevated levels of hydrogen sulfide. "It was unbearable, and I can't imagine anyone having to spend more than a minute enduring that smell," said Richmond Mayor Eduardo Martinez. Martinez says he's had enough.

He tells ABC7 News, on Tuesday Richmond will hold a special emergency meeting over the state of the city's air quality. Representatives from Veolia, the company that runs the wastewater plant, will also be in attendance. "We hope to have a lot of the public there so that the Veolia executives can actually hear testimony as to what their company is doing to the Richmond community," Martinez said. One of the areas most impacted by last week's incident was the Point Richmond neighborhood. Nathan Trivers owns a local pub there and says this isn't the first time strange odors have impacted those who live and work nearby. "We always would love for them to be conscious of the local community around there to do what they can do, but stuff happens," he said.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is investigating the incidents. Veolia says the hydrogen sulfide smell was caused by work being done to replace a fan and to drain a tank at their plant. In a statement they say in part: "...We regret that this work may have inadvertently created an odor issue for neighbors in the area. We will review our processes with the City to ensure that the City has as much notice as possible of any future work that could create odor exposure, and we will continue to implement measures to mitigate odors at the wastewater plant." Mayor Martinez says Tuesday's emergency meeting is just one step he wants to take though. He believes in the long run, the city of Richmond needs greater accountability for large companies. The mayor says he'd like to see that accountability come in the form of more regulations and higher fines paid by large companies. But he knows sometimes things aren't always that simple. "The issue with corporations like Veolia or Chevron is that when you get into litigation with them is that they have deep pockets. Richmond does not."

# **Economy & Changing Workplace**

**Friday, October 6, 2023**

**SF looks for ways to revitalize Market Street, a key role in making downtown a global destination**

San Francisco has a plan to transform the downtown area into a global destination. But that plan requires building a Better Market Street. Many say it is critical to the recovery of the local community and businesses that are still trying to lift themselves up from the pandemic. In 1962, Market Street was on the verge of a major restoration project which, at the time, caught the attention of The New York Times. That came after a city report titled: "What to do about Market Street?" The goal, back then, was to put new life into Market Street as a center for business, shopping and entertainment. Wait a minute. Here we are in 2023 and isn't that what San Francisco is trying to do, again?

Alex Hana has owned Oxford Street clothing for 30 years. "There was lots of traffic. Now the traffic is very slow," said Hana. "The only thing keeping us here is because we have loyal customers. If we depended on the traffic, we would not survive." We asked him if it was foot or car traffic he was referring to. "Both of them are hurting," he responded. Hana initially blames the demise of some businesses on the city's efforts to slowly begin banning private cars. But then in 2012, there was renewed hope for the revitalization of the area when X (formerly known as Twitter) and other businesses occupied residency here. But that proved not to be the answer everyone anticipated. Then just months before the pandemic, the city removed all car traffic from Market Street. That's when the number of bicyclists on Market Street increased by 25%. T

hen the city shut down and those workers that were supposed to revitalize the neighborhood dwindled because hardly anyone was coming to work downtown. Even the bicycle coalition admits bike commuting downtown is nowhere near what it once was. We wanted to see why many bicyclists were staying away from Market Street, so we rode. One of the things bicyclists often complain about is the uneven surfaces in some spots, not to mention the potholes and you really have to pay attention because you can seriously get hurt.

"What the city needs to do and the DPW has to do, they need to start repaving our streets wherever they are and we would like the bike lanes to also be part of that because if you make safe pavements for people biking they will use those streets," Janelle Wong of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. She says any revitalization of Market Street has to include bicyclists and pedestrians. There is a massive construction project underway, "part" of that Better Market Street makeover. The project was sold on a much larger scale. It was supposed to

make Market Street car-free from Octavia Street to the Embarcadero, but the city had to return the federal money for the project because it was unable to meet an imposed deadline. "There are a lot of unfulfilled promises but that doesn't mean that Better Market Street can't continue to be working toward a future of sustainable transportation," assured Wong. Business owners along Market Street insist customers won't return unless they feel safe and the area is clean. "Just the cleanliness. I don't like stepping in poop every day," expressed Jon Jong, a restaurant manager on Market Street.

Supervisor Matt Dorsey wants to propose a resolution to create a Downtown Commercial Core Police District. It would dedicate police patrols in the area. "If you can imagine an area that would be from the Ferry Building down Market Street, down to Market Street and Van Ness, it should also encompass Union Square. It should also encompass the Moscone Center Convention area and the hotels around there," Dorsey said. "We need to get people to say let's go to Market Street like, let's do stuff on Market Street," said Manny Yekutieli, a small business owner who also happens to be on the Municipal Transportation Board.

As a San Francisco resident, he'd like to see a section of Market Street converted into a Promenade. "Maybe even turn it into a market, maybe plant a redwood grove, landscaping, flowers, music, poetry create something happening on the street that brings people to Market Street to do things," he said. "This is a beautiful city. I love it, but unfortunately we're facing a lot of problems with the homeless, with the shoplifting. It's very tough. It's not a piece of cake. It's going to take a lot of time, long time you can say," Hana said.

### **Tuesday, October 10, 2023**

#### **Will SF be able to rehabilitate its image during next month's APEC summit?**

Here's what experts say San Francisco faces one of the biggest challenges in decades, to enhance the image of the city and not give credence to what others are saying about the ongoing issues. Next month, the world will be focused on San Francisco during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit. While there are many iconic landmarks, San Francisco's tarnished image around the world is best described as a beauty in distress. Journalists based in San Francisco who work for foreign media have much to write about.

"Especially since it changed a lot. It's not the hippie city anymore, then the tech bros came in and a lot of money came, really a lot of money came in, and San Francisco changed dramatically," explained Axel Postinett, a new reporter for Handelsblatt Media Group, a German business newspaper interested in how San Francisco grapples with its commercial real estate downturn. "The question is will we see anything like this in Germany too or in other cities," he added. That's an issue to be discussed in mid-November during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit hosted by San Francisco. Here's the APEC lineup: 21 world



leaders, 30,000 delegates, 1,200 CEOs from around the world Not only is the city's image at stake but some say it is the beginning of its economic recovery.

San Francisco has the potential to lure much needed foreign businesses to its downtown where one-third of the commercial space is vacant. "The opportunity to have international folks here, folks from China, Korea, Japan, people who are only hearing the stories and not seeing the reality in investment, to see the opportunities to invest in here and the path forward, we think is a real strong point," expressed Sarah Dennis-Phillips from the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. "We are going to showcase our cutting edge thinking on artificial intelligence and on biotech and everything else that is out there. Our autonomous vehicles, we're going to be a big showcase on all of that. Like everybody who comes to visit, we think they'll get excited about it and want to come and expand and be part of what we got here.

That could really help our economy," outlined John Grubb, of the Bay Area Council. San Francisco has just one month left to prepare. So far, the city has raised \$20 million to make it an extravagant event but also make it clean and safe. Right before his big Dreamforce convention, admittedly Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff became the squeaky wheel, suggesting he might leave if San Francisco didn't clean up. It worked. Here's what Benioff said in September once the city had cleaned up near Moscone Convention Center, where Dreamforce was held. "Everything is spiffy, cleaned up, nice, I went down Howard street, I'm like what did they do, pour fresh cement? You can eat off the sidewalk, it's incredible," expressed Benioff last month. But it only worked for a few days during Dreamforce. Howard Street is no longer gleaming and some of people hanging out on nearby streets have resumed their activities.

Mayor London Breed seemed undaunted. "What's interesting is we had about 250 delegates from around the world who are like the advanced team for APEC and we took them to the Tenderloin, we took them to neighborhoods and around the city and what they said is this happens where we are from too, we don't see what everybody is talking about, where as a city, a major city, San Francisco just like any other mayor city it has its challenges," Breed revealed. Postinett disagrees. He says, the international media will be reporting on everything they see, encounter and experience. "Keep them out of the Tenderloin. If they come here, if they see, this is definitely, absolutely outrageous. If you come here and you're not prepared for that, you really think, this is San Francisco? Oh my God!" expressed Postinett. "We are going to continue to chip away at it. We're going to continue to work very hard to get people off the streets. We're taking the very bold, controversial steps of making arrests for not just dealers but also users," added Breed.

Meanwhile, neighboring counties are watching too. "San Francisco, obviously they are going to have great motivation to try and spruce up the city," said San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe. He is concerned that those drug

dealers may quietly move across county lines, during APEC. Wagstaffe warns of what may follow. "If we see it, we arrest them, we will prosecute them and we will lock them up. We're really concerned. We do not want San Mateo County in any fashion to turn into what San Francisco has become and it won't because we're not going to let it happen," said Wagstaffe. The APEC conference is also a chance for San Francisco to take center stage when the leaders of the two largest economies, the U.S. and China sit down to meet in good faith. The meeting goes beyond trade talks. It is also an opportunity to convince more Chinese tourists to travel here, despite what they have seen or heard. Chinese tourists spent \$1.2 billion in San Francisco in 2019. But have not returned in pre-pandemic numbers. "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," added Postinett.

### **Wednesday, October 18, 2023**

#### **SF restaurant owners say Valencia St. will 'die' if controversial bike lane is not revised**

This week, we went back and heard from multiple business owners who say the bike lane is making it hard to survive on Valencia Street. "Not everyone takes a bicycle or walks. People drive though the city on the weekend. Our business went down dramatically from before. We are down more than 50%," said Eiad Eltawil, owner of Yasmin restaurant. When the Valencia Street bike lane was installed, about 70 parking spots were removed from the area. "I get a lot of calls every day, right before the shift starts. Sorry, we cannot make it. We've been looking for parking for half an hour. 45 minutes. We have to cancel," said Rafik Bouzidi, owner of Gola Restaurant.

Gola Restaurant opened five months ago. Bouzidi said it was a dream to open his business on this street, but lately it's been a nightmare. "We have seen the worst. Deliveries... we cannot get out deliveries on time. I cannot park my car to unload my groceries in front. I get a ticket," said Bouzidi. Supervisor Hilary Ronen represents the Mission District. She said her office has been swamped with hundreds of messages from cyclists complaining about the safety aspect of the bike lane. Supervisor Ronen is proposing a solution. "If they made it a one-way street, maybe we can have a place for people to double park.

We can have bike lanes that are on the side of the streets, and we could engineer things so both sides can be happier," said Supervisor Ronen. Sustainable transportation advocate Luke Bornheimer is calling for change. "It's either to pedestrianize the street or install curb side protected bike lanes immediately. Not wait any longer. We've already had an 80-year-old man die and many more people injured and many close calls where people were almost hit. So, we don't need to wait for another person to be killed or injured, we need the SFMTA board of directors to act now," said Bornheimer.

On Monday, during the SFMTA Board of Directors meeting, the Citizen's Advisory Committee made strong recommendations to end the pilot program. "The SFMTA CAC recommends abandoning the unintuitive and dangerous center-running bicycle lane pilot on Valencia and refocusing the street towards its corridor needs." In a statement, SFMTA acknowledged the impacts of the bike lane and said in part: "We are committed to continued changes throughout the pilot period to optimize the available space to the extent possible." As it stands, business owners like Bouzidi don't think they can wait for the pilot program to run its course. "Within a year, this street will die completely if this continues. This street will die and then it will be conducting CPR on a dead body, pretty much. Try to revive a thing that is dead already. Too late. You have to catch it right now," said Bouzidi. The SFMTA Board of Directors did not make a decision Monday. Supervisor Ronen is urging the public to contact SFMTA with opinions.

Full SFMTA statement: "SFMTA understands that deliveries and loading are critical for small businesses, on Valencia and throughout San Francisco. Of all the potential design options for protected bike lanes on Valencia, the center bike lane pilot provides the most curb space to meet local business needs. All other options for protected bike lanes would result in even more significant changes. That said, SFMTA also understands that implementation of the center bike lane has resulted in many changes to parking availability, and to how businesses receive deliveries. SFMTA continues to monitor the parking and loading needs along the corridor and meet with stakeholders including the merchant community, and we are committed to continued changes throughout the pilot period to optimize the available space to the extent possible. We have made targeted changes to address specific merchant concerns. For instance, we relocated on-street bike racks near Smitten to accommodate a larger loading zone. \*And several six-wheel commercial loading zones are being converted to regular commercial loading zones to better accommodate merchant loading needs."

### **Wednesday, October 18, 2023**

#### **San Jose to lease private land for \$1 a year to build tiny home community**

Homelessness is one of the biggest issues facing the Bay Area and every city is trying to figure out ways to get more people off the streets. The San Jose City Council unanimously approved a five-year land lease to build a 150-bed emergency interim-housing site. John A. Sobrato and The Sobrato Organization is leasing the land to the city for \$1 a year. In a statement shared with ABC7 News, John's son, John M. Sobrato said: "My father's offer on behalf of the Sobrato Family Foundation of a five-year no-cost lease of the property on Via del Oro for interim housing, is an admirable effort to help one of San Jose's most vulnerable populations.

It complements The Sobrato Organization's broader Housing Security Initiative, a pilot program to address housing insecurity in Silicon Valley through a three-pronged approach that includes preservation, production, and pro-housing policy.

While the Via del Oro project will provide immediate relief for the unhoused, we are concurrently advancing more permanent solutions such as our Foundation's recent acquisition of the townhomes on Gading in Hayward to ensure it remains as affordable housing." San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan is equally excited for the opportunity. "What this would do is open up private land to be part of the solution to homelessness," Mahan said. "That's not what we have done. All of our sites today are on publicly owned land, city owned land, VTA land, Caltrans land and this is a potential game changer."

The units will feature many of the amenities as other tiny home projects, but they will be solar-powered with limited hookups to allow them to be moved off site when the lease is up. There will still be private bathrooms, but in a group setting and not attached to the unit like other tiny homes. Mayor Mahan says the average stay for residents in similar units is six to nine months, with more than 50% moving to permanent housing. So, he says 1,500 people could be housed here over five years. "It's creating a pipeline out of homelessness to combat the pipeline into homelessness that is far too common in our community today," Mayor Mahan said. While the city views this plot of land as an absolute win, the surrounding community is not as happy. "We have lost trust and are disappointed in our community representative and mayor," Resident Issa Ajlouny said. Ajlouny says neighbors voiced their disapproval to this plan to their

Councilmember Arjun Batra, saying South San Jose already has more tiny homes than other parts of the city. "Councilmember Batra agreed no more tiny homes in this area and would include this in his memo," Ajlouny said. "The community was also surprised because his memo omitted this because the mayor would not agree. Councilmember Batra then told the community he would ask for a no encampment zone when the city council would vote. He failed the community again when he did not mention this in his motion." The approved plan would prioritize unhoused residents currently close to the new site when deciding who gets to live on the property. Councilmember Batra says the council will explore designated no encampment zones near tiny homes in the future. "Our goal would be to get this new site built, have those encampments which are there nearby, those people who live nearby would move into those things and clear out encampment and hopefully never have another encampment appear in that area," Councilmember Batra said. Construction is likely to begin in early to mid 2024.

### **Monday, October 30, 2023**

#### **City of Antioch announces \$500K grant program to help improve small businesses**

Antioch Mayor Lamar Thorpe and other city leaders announced a new \$500,000 grant program designed to give small business money to upgrade their storefronts. The goal is to make them nicer and safer. "If you go outside right now, you can take a look at some of the businesses that are boarded," Mayor

Thorpe said. "They may not have the capital to make the investments we would like them to see." Mayor Thorpe met with small business store owners Monday in south Antioch. Many of them say the area is filled with unhoused individuals and crime is rampant. Nisha Toor and her family own a convenience store next to a closed supermarket. They say unhoused use the store for shelter. Two weeks ago, a fire broke out inside the building and caused enough damage to the point where fire officials forced them to close. "They came in and said our fire alarm is out of code as well as the sprinklers," Toor said. "They said 'you have to close, it is no longer safe to operate.'"

Her family has owned that store for over 20 years. Now, there is a fence around the entire building. It is a sight commonly seen in the entire neighborhood. "People don't want to come out," said Jaz, the owner of Veer Da Dhaba Market and Restaurant. "They don't want to shop because while they are here eating, their cars are getting broken." The new grant money will be prioritized for businesses who are in areas of high crime. The city will use census data to determine that. Any business owner who applies and gets approved will get between \$5,000-\$20,000. They say upgrading the storefront will make it more appealing for people to shop at. Mayor Thorpe says it is not solely going to fix the issues, but it will be another tool for the city to help the community. "I would never say one strategy is going to fix all the problems," Mayor Thorpe said. "Just like I am going to say adding all these police is not going to solve the problems. It has to be collective strategies in order to have a meaningful impact."

### **Tuesday, November 7, 2023**

#### **The challenges San Francisco faces converting office space into residential units**

As San Francisco continues to have the weakest recovery from the pandemic of any major US city, 34 percent of downtown office space is now empty. At the same time, there's not enough housing in the city. Could some of that empty office space be turned into much-needed housing? San Francisco is in a constant battle with itself: Too much commercial space but not enough housing. "It does cost less, in many examples, to convert one of these buildings than to build fresh," said Marc Babsin, principal of Emerald Fund, a San Francisco-based real estate development company. That's what Mayor London Breed wants to hear. Like a marriage, she believes "the coming together" of the two may help to revitalize downtown. "We will continue to adapt, we will adjust and we will be better," Breed has insisted. The operative word is "conversions." It's been done before. In 2006, the Royal Insurance Building at Sansome and Pine Streets across from the old Pacific Stock Exchange was converted from office space to 46 condos. The Ritz-Carlton building on Market Street with 52 units was once the site of the San Francisco Chronicle. And in the 1930s, A.P. Giannini, had a branch of the Bank of Italy. It later became the Bank of America, which lent Walt Disney the money to complete his first feature film, "Snow White," and later, other projects.

That building, One Powell Street was converted into 44 high-end lofts in 2004. We know it's possible but what does it take to convert a commercial space into residential units? The answer: it's not that simple. Strachan Forgan knows a thing or two about conversions. His firm, Solomon Cordwell Buenz was behind the largest office-to-residential conversion in San Francisco's history, 100 Van Ness, a 29-story building that now has 418 rental units. 100 Van Ness was the old AAA building. "The biggest thing we did with the building was to remove the old precast concrete facade and to replace them with floor-to-ceiling glass to really allow the view potential in the building to be realized," outlined Forgan. Inside, for many conversion projects, one of the biggest challenges is the plumbing. "So that means we have to cut new vertical risers throughout the building," explained Forgan. Which means drilling holes through the concrete.

Each unit must now have its own plumbing, sprinkler heads, thermostat, heating and ventilation, and lighting. "Light and air and natural light into the units is a big deal," said Joseph Camajani of engineering consulting company IMEG. "Many of these office footprints are very large and deep and it's difficult to get natural light into the bedroom units." For IMEG, a floor-to-ceiling glass exterior was ideal. ABC7 asked at what point do you decide to knock the building down and build from the ground up? "I think there are some buildings that have reached the end of their useful life and the highest and best use of that land might be to build new construction," said Forgan. He's now looking at 15 possible conversions in San Francisco, but only three to five are potential candidates. The other challenge is dealing with the Planning Department. Because the city really wanted 100 Van Ness to succeed, the permits were expedited. The property was purchased in 2011 and only four years later was ready for occupancy. There are other conversions that have been enormously profitable as well, like at 2121 Webster Street in Pacific Heights, the old University of the Pacific Dentistry School.

It went on the market in 2016 and the sale of the 76 condos is said to have generated \$300 million. But that was then. Today in 2023, conversions may be less profitable. "Construction costs have probably doubled what they were and rents right now, rents have dropped so much that they're not much above from what they were in 2012," revealed Babsin. Also, when 100 Van Ness was being built, the city required the owners to set aside 13 percent of the units for affordable housing, today it's 21% Any developer, architect, or engineer will tell you that City Hall will need to provide more incentives to make these conversions more realistic. "We've got this huge inventory of buildings that could be good enough and could be useful to people who need them," said Camajani.

### **Friday, December 1, 2023**

### **San Francisco now at 35% office vacancy rate, highest ever recorded**

The skyline of San Francisco's Financial District is about as picturesque as it gets. An area that was bustling with people several years ago, but one that

according to the numbers, is now more vacant than ever. "Right now in downtown San Francisco, we have a vacancy rate of a little over 35% which is the highest that we've ever recorded in the history of San Francisco," says Colin Yasukochi who is an executive director of the tech insights center at CBRE, which focuses on the tech industry and how it affects commercial real estate. Yasukochi says that office vacancy numbers in San Francisco were 3 to 4% pre-pandemic, meaning we've seen more than a 30% increase and that trend may continue.

"We think that the vacancy rate will probably creep up some more in 2024, probably at least through the first half of the year. I would say because there still are firms who are consolidating and reducing the amount of office space they have," said Yasukochi. "The challenge still remains - remote work and the city's reliance on tech as it's largest industry and those tech workers, they've been working from home for a very long time and many of those businesses are operating successfully from home," said Jeff Bellisario of the Bay Area Council. Bellisario says homelessness, crime, public safety, and all around cleanliness are still the top concerns among current and potential San Francisco employers. He also says one thing is true.

"It's not a doom loop, right? The numbers don't necessarily suggest that. A doom loop would have high unemployment, it would have businesses running to other cities. That's not where we are but we're not in a spot where we are thriving and succeeding, we're kind of surviving," said Bellisario. While companies like Nordstrom, Cinemark, and Old Navy have closed retail locations in the city, Bellisario says San Francisco business license data shows that overall the city is no longer losing more companies than it's gaining. Still though, retail vacancy rates have risen to above 18% in Union Square. Kazuko Morgan of Cushman and Wakefield says businesses are opening up and good news is on the horizon. "There are a number of leases that have been signed and not been announced that will probably be forthcoming next year. We have a fair amount of tenants that are under construction so that's going to add to the vibrancy as well," said Morgan.

Morgan says that workers going back to the office and more conventions would both help retail; but the positive image of San Francisco must also get out there too. "Our biggest issue I think has just been the media backlash with the media throwing us under the bus, and I think that is probably been one of the toughest things we have had to deal with," said Morgan. ABC 7 News reporter J.R. Stone responded by saying, "People go and take video of dozens of people running out of a store and all of a sudden you see Walgreens close multiple locations and CVS close multiple locations. I do think there is something to be said in that there are actual problems." "Yes there are actual problems, those problems exist in every city, every shopping mall, even some of the best with the best of security and your classic high-end luxury," responded Morgan. Politicians have talked about the recent interest in San Francisco from artificial intelligence companies.

Those we talked with said that while that is a definite positive going forward, those AI companies would take up only a small portion of the millions of square feet of vacant space available

### **Thursday, December 7, 2023**

#### **5 days in the office: SF small businesses say it may be the only way they can survive**

Folsom and 2nd street, south of Market could very well be the epicenter of San Francisco's doom loop. Ask Jeff Handy, owner of Social 303 restaurant in the shadow of this once booming neighborhood. "This building that I'm standing in front of used to have 4,000 people in it - now there are 400. So you are looking at businesses in San Francisco that are suffering more than any other city in the country," expressed Handy. Bringing those people back into the office more than two to three days a week has been a challenge for the city regardless of what the mayor has said in the past. Here's what San Francisco Mayor London Breed said last September.

"Who doesn't want to go meet with their co-workers after work and have a drink and let the traffic die down?" As we discovered, apparently, thousands of people who live or work in San Francisco are willing to come back in-person five days a week. "Return-to-work policies were not as heavily endorsed in San Francisco and that hurt all of us and continues to," added Handy. The Oasis Grill next to the Embarcadero Center is a classic example. Since COVID, they have not recovered and find that the private sector has little interest in supporting small businesses. Manager Osman Zughayer, thinks the downtown recovery is achievable if people come back into the offices. "To bring at least 90% of the employees back - how do you do that? I don't know, maybe the mayor should do that, the government," insisted Zughayer.

We asked Supervisor Ahsha Safai how the city plans to bring back the workforce more often than just a few days. Ahsha Safai: "We are exponentially impacted by the amount of tech and public service businesses that have chosen to remain remote and so at the end of the day..." Lyanne Melendez: "Hold on a minute - the city also has employees still working from home." Safai: "They do have the ability to stay home two days a week and again that is decision of the mayor. Ultimately the mayor." Melendez: "Should that change?" Safai: "I think we are in a place right now, we can go to flex schedules, we can allow people to do not necessarily 9-5 in some areas but absolutely we need to be coming back five days a week." Next stop, the mayor. We asked her will she ask all city employees to come back to work five days a week.

"So to be clear, most of our 34,000 city employees are back at work. Not all. Most of them, but City Hall is pretty much at capacity and other city buildings. Many of the folks who are maybe not at work are, a lot are tech support but I think it's more... the latest number and maybe I should get the latest number to



give to you but it's a really high percentage," said Mayor Breed. City Hall eventually got back to us to report that approximately three-quarters of city staff is working in-person full time. "Since the pandemic, things have changed. Do I want everyone at work all the time, yes I do," added Breed. To make matters worse for these small businesses, APEC didn't deliver the kind of boom they anticipated, for a number of reasons.

First, there was the security zone imposed by the Secret Service. "As APEC started to step in, we anticipated a three-day heavy closure with a little set up, it was much larger than expected as it really became a 10-day shutdown for the entire neighborhood," said Scott Rowitz of the Yerba Buena Community Benefit District. Secondly, people were told to work from home to avoid the traffic jams and the protesters. "From Fisherman's Wharf to downtown to Union Square to Japantown, there is no question it was quieter through the city. People did heed the warning," added Rowitz. According to the Yerba Buena Community Benefit Center, the average revenue for small businesses near Moscone Center was down by more than 64%. Many of these affected businesses are hoping the city keeps its promise of compensating them for their losses. The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to set aside \$10 million to help those businesses that experienced heavy losses.

### **Friday, December 8, 2023**

#### **SF to pay street vendors \$1K, launch campaign to promote them during 90-day ban**

On Thursday, the city of San Francisco announced financial help for vendors who are currently being banned from selling on Mission Street as the city tackles the stolen goods market in the area. Tensions continue to flare in San Francisco's Mission District as permitted street vendors held a private meeting with Supervisor Hillary Ronen urging her to end the 90-day street ban. "Everyone after that including myself, is angry. Because she doesn't listen to us and she said this is what I want. She was closed to negotiations and proposals," said Rodrigo López, a street vendor. After two weeks of the ban, the city announced a financial support package for vendors.

But many say they just want to go back to the streets. "One-thousand dollars - but it doesn't mean anything to us. With a \$1,000, we can make it selling on the street in one week. Easily, said López "We don't need for the city to give us any type of help. We always work and can support ourselves," said Cesar Oyagata, a street vendor. On Thursday, Mayor London Breed said the city's one-time payout was in response to the challenges vendors are facing as city inspectors and law enforcement tackle unpermitted street vendors selling stolen items on Mission Street.

"We don't want them to be penalized financially because of all the other stuff that is going on," said Mayor Breed. San Francisco's Office of Economic and

Workforce Development is also launching a marketing campaign to help promote the two locations the city rented for vendors to sell indoors. "Launching the campaign today. We've been working with community partners so we have a website and we even have profiles of the vendors. Some of them and their products," said Diana Ponce de Leon, community economic development director for the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Vendors have categorized those two locations; 2137 Mission St. and a large tent on Lilac Alley as "dead zones." Calle 24 runs the tent where many are feeling frustrated. "It created a solution however, it's still affecting the people that were following the rules. They were paying taxes and have a legit business and they are only making \$10 when they are lucky a day - how can they survive like that," said Susana Rojas, executive director of Calle 24.

Santiago Lerma is the new Mission District street crisis response manager with Supervisor Ronen's office and said the ban is working and will continue despite the challenges. "The street has been clear. The amount of drug users on the street has really diminished. The amount of stolen goods on the streets is almost completely gone," said Lerma. Luz Peña: "'If it's so clean now, why not let them go back,' is what many are saying." Santiago Lerma: "Well, the issue is that we have a lot of folks that are waiting for us to turn our backs." Vendors say they feel like collateral damage in a fight to end illicit activity despite them having permits all along. "The plan is to escalate to go and try to the mayor," said López and added, "For us, Mission Street that's the place - we don't want to be anywhere else. We want to be here."

### **Friday, December 15, 2023**

#### **SF makes changes to planning code to make it easier for businesses to get permits**

San Francisco Mayor London Breed on Thursday announced 100 changes to the city's planning code that would make it easier for new and existing businesses to thrive. These new laws will make it easier for business owners to either expand or change their business model or even for new businesses to open, removing the burden of the typical permitting process. Ten months ago, Anthony Strong opened Pasta Supply Co. in San Francisco's Inner Richmond. "We make 30 different shapes. Thirty different pasta shapes and 20ish different sauces basically," said Anthony Strong, Owner of Pasta Supply Co. Mayor London Breed says the changes will help new and current business owners focus on their businesses and not fear the city's permitting process. "These pieces of legislation is going to make things that were impossible for years to happen in the city possible," said Mayor Breed.

One-hundred changes to the city's planning code means eliminating fees and streamlining rules around permits. "It also does a lot of things to just remove simple zoning restrictions that won't allow one person with a guitar to play at a coffee shop," said Ben Bleiman with the Entertainment Commission, and added,

"This is huge. Huge, huge for these businesses." One of the changes impacts liquor licenses for music venues. "Now through this legislation bars and nighttime entertainment and restaurants that want to add liquor licenses, they can actually go through and be eligible for the expedited review process. So they would have a hearing within 90 days," said Katy Tang, director of the San Francisco's Office of Small Business. These changes will also allow neighborhoods like Haight Ashbury to grow. For decades, they've had a cap on the number of restaurants and businesses allowed. That's changing now.

"We will be able to have more restaurants. The shops will be able to have a more diverse offering where if they wanted to do coffee, music, a pop-up - we can do all these things and be able to do pilot programs to see what works," said Sunshine Powers, president of the Haight Ashbury Merchant Association. These changes are adding to previous small business reforms that went into the effect during the pandemic. "Removing roadblocks to opening businesses is going to help us business owners. Anybody who wants to be one can open with less headache and that is going to create thriving neighborhoods and communities," said Strong. The city has helped business owners with past small business reforms like the passage of Prop H in 2020 and the Small Business Recovery Act in 2021, which allowed for more commercial projects to be processed faster. The new laws will go into effect in 30 days.

## **Race & Social Justice**

**Sunday, October 8, 2023**

**Santa Clara Co. community groups acknowledge Latina Equal Pay Day to close wage gap for women**

A call to action Friday by community leaders in the South Bay. They came together to acknowledge "Latina Equal Pay Day," calling on local leaders and businesses to close the wage gap. Thursday marked Latina Equal Pay Day and Friday, the summit of community leaders and businesses came together to acknowledge it. Latina Equal Pay Day is the approximate day Latinas have to work into the new year to make what their male counterparts made at the end of the year before. "It takes a Latina 22 months to make what a white male counterpart would make in one year's time," said Gabriela Chavez-Lopez, executive director of the Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley, "So they almost have to work two years' time to make that of their white male counterparts.

That isn't fair, that isn't sustainable." According to data provided to UCLA, Latinas nationally are paid 52 cents on the dollar compared to white, non-Hispanic men. Overall, Latinas in California are paid 51 cents on the dollar compared to white men. Those in California with a bachelor's degree are paid 42 cents on the dollar. "It's so backwards, it actually works to where the higher

education and the more degrees that you receive, the larger the wage gap widens," Chavez-Lopez said, "So it's kind of opposite of what you would think. It's because things are more competitive, there's higher wages, you're competing at higher levels of leadership."

Chavez-Lopez says locally, the wage gap can be even wider. "Women of color, particularly Black, and Latina women, as well as Indigenous women really get the short end of the stick," she said, "The number one reason is discrimination in the workplace." But advocates stress in the long run, it's better for business to be equitable. Javier Diaz, CEO of OSI Engineering says the salaries they offer are based only on experience and value, something that's benefitted his company. "It increases morale, and it also increases diversity in the company," he said, "As we know, here, the Silicon Valley and throughout the world, having a diverse workforce, you're able to accomplish more and do more with a with a diverse workforce." HLX+ is also one of the groups pushing for wage equality locally and nationwide.

They say the conversations sparked by Latina Equal Pay day need to continue year round. "One of the messages we want to get across in our program today is to show programs that are working," said Edward Vargas president of the HLX+ northwest region, "How to put those metrics in place and collaborate with people to move the needle." As calls continue for businesses to do better, Chavez-Lopez says responsibility also needs to be placed on government. She says the coalition and partner organizations will continue to add pressure until the wage gap is closed. "I think it's important for all of us, just to know that this is something that's needed and wanted in our communities," she said, "Everyone benefits when women in particular are paid fairly and equally for equal work."

### **Wednesday, October 11, 2023**

#### **San Jose synagogue, community stands with Israel through evening of unity and prayer**

Through songs and prayers, San Jose community members and city leaders gathered for an evening of unity and solidarity amid the war in Israel and Gaza. On Tuesday evening members of the synagogue Chabad of Almaden hosted an event called San Jose Stands with Israel. Rabbi Mendel Weinfeld said now is the time the Jewish community needs to come together. "What did we do at every challenge that came our way? We came together like we're doing here, now, tonight," Weinfeld said. He said it is a privilege to live in a place of freedom of speech and freedom of religion in the US. Elected officials joined in to show their support. Mayor Matt Mahan said we should do our best to see each other's humanity. "Our city will continue to stand for diversity, for inclusion, for self-expression, for religious freedom, and against hate and discrimination and violence," Mahan said.

Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen was in Israel six months ago with elected officials. He said they met many people from Kfar Aza. "And some of them are dead and some of them are missing," Rosen said. Rosen talked about the reasons he became a prosecutor. "My dad was in three different concentration camps in Poland and was liberated from Bergen-Belsen in April of 1945," Rosen said. "And then spent another five years in displaced persons camps in Germany before coming to this country in 1950. And there was no justice for my dad and my family - there was no justice for the Jewish people and there was no justice in the world then."

Rosen went on to say reading and seeing the images of people ripped from their homes and murdered or kidnapped is a very difficult thing. A father of an Israeli soldier on the front lines led a prayer. ABC7 News spoke to people who are in constant contact with their loved ones. Campbell resident Hedva Weiner said her whole family is in Ashkelon, Israel. "They live in the first big city, so they're affected every day," Weiner said. San Jose resident Cassie Gallo said she has friends on a flight to go fight. "Worried, concerned, a little helpless being so far away knowing that the only way we have to communicate with anyone back there is through our phones, through social media, through WhatsApp," Gallo said.

### **Sunday, October 15, 2023**

#### **Bay Area Jewish community ties ribbons, rallies for Israel as war in Middle East continues**

Hundreds came out to support the people of Israel for a rally in San Francisco Sunday and on the Peninsula, Stanford students tied ribbons to combat some recent hate messages on the conflict. Several hundred people rallied at San Francisco Civic Center to show their support for Israel in the midst of the conflict. "We want our children back," the group chanted. The activists condemned the actions of Hamas pleaded for the safe return of kidnapped families and children. Dana Hellman held up a poster of a missing child. "What's going to happen to this kid? He's four, how will he hold on in Hamas captivity? I don't know, we need to bring our people home," Hellman said.

Shanie Roth attends college in Tel Aviv, where her grandparents live. They spend the day in bomb shelters, my grandfather is in the hospital, elderly people are suffering because of this," Roth said. "Jewish and Israeli students have been struggling for the past week," said Rabbi Jessica Kirschner. Hillel at Stanford Rabbi Jessica Kirschner says it's why students tied blue ribbons around campus Sunday. She says it's a response to anti-Israeli messages written in chalk and on banners this week. "When there was silence at the beginning from high levels of the University. The noise that filled it was frightening and alienating. I think our students are trying to put out a different message," Kirschner said. They were in the week students from Hillel held a vigil and lit candles to pray for Israel.

### **Tuesday, October 31, 2023**

## **California DOJ finds implicit bias still impacting health of pregnant Black women**

In a news conference, California Attorney General Rob Bonta announced the results of a new Department of Justice investigation. The investigation looks at implicit bias among health care workers in perinatal settings and shows the need for more progress. "We need to listen to this data. It's screaming at us to do something," Bonta said. It comes after the state legislature passed a bill back in 2019 requiring all health professionals to receive training to reduce racial biases. According to recent data, Black women have maternal mortality rates far higher than any other racial group, and three to four times that of white women. "Many Black moms aren't taken seriously when they communicate their pains, their discomfort to doctors.

And we know that those are biases, they're non-intentional biases that staff at hospitals hold," said Je Ton Carey. Carey works with the Children's Council of San Francisco. She says socioeconomic factors like a lack of investment, as well as systemic racism are two of the main reasons behind the high mortality rate for Black women. And it doesn't just revolve around childbirth. Carey says the health care inequities also have an impact on millions of Black children. "The development of social, emotional, kindergarten readiness, are all key components that are impacted by Black moms, Black families not having the necessary access to resources," Carey said.

The attorney general says that when the investigation began in August of 2021, less than 17% of hospitals up and down the state had begun training their employees. Now, that number is above 80%. "These are not suggestions. These are not recommendations or options. These are the law - they must be followed. We need deadlines, we need an enforcer and we need consequences," Bonta said. Despite the progress, Bonta says more work needs to be done. "Time is of the essence. When it comes to health care, bias can be the difference between life and death," Bonta said.

### **Friday, November 10, 2023**

#### **Jewish community protests Oakland teachers' resolution supporting Palestinians, cease-fire**

A group gathered to protest a resolution passed by the Oakland Education Association this week regarding the war between Israel and Hamas. ABC7 News has not been provided a copy of the resolution from OEA but Jewish parents and teachers, who say they've seen it, shared it with us and say they are enraged by it. The resolution appears to support Palestinian liberation, calls for an immediate end to the occupation of Gaza by the Israeli military and calls on all elected officials to call for an immediate cease-fire. It also mentions giving support to any teachers reprimanded for teaching about Palestinian liberation in their classrooms. The group, including Jewish teachers, parents, members of the

American Jewish Committee and the ADL and Jewish Community Relations Council were some of those speaking out against the resolution during a news conference Friday at Montclair Elementary in Oakland. They're calling on OEA to reverse the resolution and apologize. "This was terrorism that Hamas engaged in and terrorism that OEA is endorsing," said Marc Levine, ADL regional director. "And what's happened since here in our own community.

Anti-Semitic incidents have increased by nearly 400% since Oct. 7 and engaging in the type of political activity that OEA is engaging in is encouraging anti-Semitism against our own Jewish community. It is wrong." "We are afraid to send our kids to school," said Heather Eisner, who has children going to schools in the Oakland Unified School District. "We are afraid to wear a Jewish star. We are removing mezuzahs from our doors. I have a hard time understanding why a teachers union or school board thinks they should be creating resolutions around one of the most complex international conflicts, when even global leaders currently cannot agree on a resolution."

Those at the news conference say they hope the Oakland Unified School District school board doesn't pass a resolution about the war and there had been talk about that happening. ABC7 News reached out to OUSD and hasn't heard back. OEA sent ABC7 this statement but it doesn't appear to address their most recent resolution but rather an earlier one centered around student activism: "Please see our updated Facebook post (excerpted below): Our Executive Board passed a resolution in response to student activism around the conflict in Israel and Palestine. A post on our Instagram did not accurately represent our original resolution passed by our Executive Board. We take responsibility and are learning from this harmful mistake.

Over the past few weeks, we've heard from our members, students, and families about their views on the conflict in Israel and Palestine. As educators, we are always seeking to listen and learn. As unionists, we are moved by calls for solidarity from civilians in both Israel and Palestine. We are committed to continuing the conversation within our union as we engage in our democratic processes. Our union unequivocally condemns anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We call for the release of hostages held by Hamas. We mourn the loss of life, and we add our voices to a growing collective calling for a ceasefire. We will continue to hold space for conversations in our union and in our community about this resolution and how we can move forward together."

### **Monday, November 6, 2023**

#### **Attorneys of 2022 SJ police shooting victim call for hate crime charges amid racist text messages**

We're learning more about a growing controversy involving racist texts sent by a now former San Jose police officer. The offensive texts were sent in the wake the shooting of a Black man last spring. Now the same Black man at the center of

the texting controversy spoke out with his attorneys on Sunday. "It hurts and scares me, knowing how much hate a person could have in their heart," said 22-year-old K'Auan Green. Green reacting to the newly revealed racist texts sent by the former San Jose police officer who shot him last spring outside La Victoria Taqueria, where Green says he disarmed someone involved in a fight. "I feel like the hero of the situation that took place on March 27," Green said. Officer Mark McNamara shot Green as he was backing out of the restaurant with the confiscated gun. In a newly surfaced text dated the day after the shooting, McNamara wrote to fellow officers. "N\*\*\*\* wanted to carry a gun in the Wild, Wild West. Not on my watch," read civil rights attorney Adante Pointer.

The shooting sent Green to the hospital, where he faced a long recovery. He was forced to take a break from his football career at Contra Costa College. His attorney, Pointer, says the racist texts are the final insult. "These were disgusting text messages -- vile text messages," Pointer said. In some of the texts, McNamara said: "I'm pretty sure the district attorney would have charged me if I used excessive force, but she didn't, because I didn't use excessive force, I'll shoot you too."

McNamara said of Green's legal team, texting: "They should all be bowing to me and bringing me gifts, otherwise he would have lived a life of poverty and crime." In another text writing that he hates Black people. McNamara resigned from the SJPD last week after texts surfaced. Lawyers are demanding McNamara be charged criminally with a hate crime and be decertified as a police officer. "California's police officer's association needs to decertify McNamara so he can never bring his racist thoughts to bear in the community again," Pointer said. "I never thought somebody would have that much hatred in their heart that they'd want to kill because of what I look like," Green said. San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan says his city has a zero tolerance for racial bias. "We are not going to tolerate racism. We are going to continue working hard every day to build a culture of the utmost respect and professionalism in our community," Mahan said. Green says he's moving forward, hoping to achieve his dream in football. "I Hope to play in the NFL," he said.

The City of San Jose has faced a civil rights suit since the 2022 shooting. "So much of a civil rights case depends on what the officer's state of mind was," Legal analyst Steven Clark said. Legal analyst Steven Clark says those messages could paint a picture of the officer's state of mind. "Now we have this picture of this racial hatred that's being disseminated by the officer shortly after shooting an African-American man in the back," Clark said, "I think that creates a whole new view of this case on many levels, and you will see, certainly for the civil rights case, that these will be the centerpiece of the case to show this officer acted differently because the person that was shot was African-American." Though Officer McNamara resigned and is no longer an SJPD officer, Green and Pointer are calling on him to be decertified. "He should not have the honor of



ever carrying a badge and gun on behalf or in the community's name," Pointer said.

As for Green and Pointer's calls for McNamara to face criminal charges, Clark says it's not out of the question. "The way he responded in a text messages and other avenues was really inappropriate. And I think that will be key in what the DA does next criminally with this officer," Clark said. We asked for an interview with Police Chief Mata Monday following Green and Pointer's press conference. We were told that he was not available and no further comments could be made since the matter is pending litigation being handled by the city attorney's office. Tuesday, November 21, 2023 90K settlement reached after woman's hijab removed in Santa Clara Co. jail. A victory for religious freedoms in Santa Clara County. Last October, Asia Aden was booked into the Main Jail and forced to remove her hijab while in custody until she was released. It was the second complaint in two years involving the removal of a religious head covering at a Santa Clara County jail.

Now, a settlement was reached between the San Francisco Bay Area Office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office to protect ensure it doesn't happen again. "We were told last time that there were new policies in place, that training had happened and that we would not have to worry about this happening again," CAIR-SFBA exec. director Zahra Billoo said. "And then it did. The trauma that that experience caused is something that we want to make sure no one else, be it a Muslim, Sikh or otherwise, ever experiences." In addition to a \$90,000 financial settlement for Aden, CAIR-SFBA and the sheriff's office created a policy that will allow people to keep their head covering or be provided one while in custody - including in booking photos. Law enforcement can still have detainees remove head coverings for safety purposes, like pat and search for mental health concerns, but it would be in a private setting or away from men.

Sheriff Bob Jonsen said in a statement: "The Sheriff's Office respects all religious faiths, and the office is committed to ensuring safety and security within the jail facilities in a manner that is consistent with protecting the rights and religious expression of those in its custody." "My hope is that this settlement is a step forward," Billoo said. "It is the county and the sheriff's office demonstrating that they understand that this is not the standard." "We approached this as an opportunity to educate and not to blame," CAIR-SFBA senior civil rights attorney Jeffrey Wang said. "You can't undo the harm that my client has suffered, but it was really important to my client that this same kind of harm not happen to other people." This new policy is being implemented now at Santa Clara County jails. In January, Senate Bill 309 will offer similar religious freedom protections at all prisons and jails in California.

**Tuesday, November 21, 2023**

**90K settlement reached after woman's hijab removed in Santa Clara Co. jail**

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### **Monday, November 27, 2023**

#### **Alameda Co. DA Pamela Price holds community forum discussing accomplishments, challenges recall**

Alameda County District Attorney Pamela Price held another in a series of public forums Saturday night in Oakland. "The position that you all have elected me to fulfill is about accountability," she told the crowd. Part of the panel discussion was to explain what exactly a District Attorney does. "As the district attorney, I believe that I am the guardian of public safety," says Price, who is facing a strong recall campaign. "I am not the police. I work on things after the police do their job." She listed off some of her accomplishments since taking the office in January. Those include hiring more crime investigators, expanding victims services, and creating reentry and resentencing commissions. Alameda County District Attorney

Pamela Price is launching the "Protect The Win" campaign to fight back against her recall. Joining her were those who were formerly incarcerated, including Lawrence Cox. He who spoke of how rehabilitation and reentry programs leads to stronger public safety. "The police over police our neighborhoods. The D.A.s over prosecute us. They give us excessive sentence and then they just send us away," Cox told the crowd.

Alameda County District Attorney Pamela Price held another heated town hall in Fremont Wednesday in hundreds in attendance. "Whether it's education. Whether it is looking for housing. Whether it's looking for work. I think it is imperative that we have reentry programs not just through nonprofits, but the same agencies that sentence us and send us away," adds Cox, who is with the group All Of Us Or None, a legal advocacy group for the formerly incarcerated. There was also praise for D.A. Price's progressive approach that factors in more context around sentencing, which they believe can reduce over-sentencing, especially for people of color.

"Creating a situation where the people that (were) once committing these crimes, have an opportunity to reform. Have direction. I don't know any other district attorney's office that does this," explains Shedrick Henry, who served decades behind bars and who now mentors others. Price recently launched "Protect The Win" in an effort to challenge the recall. All the while, focused on what she has been elected to do. "And that my deputies understand that they mandate is not just to get a conviction, but to do justice," she says.

### **Friday, December 8, 2023**

#### **Multidisciplinary art show honors 13 notable Black women in Oakland**

A multidisciplinary art show in Oakland called "Throughline" just wrapped up several sold-out shows earlier this month. It celebrated 13 change-making Black women in the city. "I typically paint skin," said Taylor Smalls, co-creator of Throughline and painter for the show. "I love to paint Black and Brown skin." Smalls walked ABC7 News through the visual elements of the show. Giant portraits of the 13 women painted in bright hues like yellow, pink and red floated throughout the space. The scale of Smalls' work is stunning. In some cases, the canvases are nine feet tall. "Working really large scale like this also just gives testament to these women as well," Smalls said. "They should be focused upon." All of the women honored come from different industries, but they all add to the joy, growth and change in Oakland.

"This show was really born conceptually in the pandemic, where I really wanted to just lean into a full body of work, that was based around women in Oakland," Smalls said. To name a few, honorees included retail and style-maker Sherri McMullen, musician Goapele and journalist Niema Jordan. "We just dove into kind of formulating this list of women that are both very well-known people in Oakland, but also some very unsung heroes as well," Smalls said. The shows

begins with a culinary experience from the Last Supper Society influenced by the paintings. Then, attendees are guided as a group through the show by actor Michael Wayne Turner III, who created a poem and monologue to accompany each painting. The show closes with a vocal performance by Mara Hruby. Each portrait was painted from a photograph by Brandon Ruffin. All of the participating artists are based in Oakland.

"You don't have to follow very strict institutional structures of putting your work out into the world," Smalls said. "This is totally grassroots. We did this on our own. We're in this space on our own." Xavier Cunningham co-created the show with Smalls. "It may not be the perfect answer, but the truthful answer is, it's (the show) something more," Cunningham said. "It's really an immersive experience that encapsulates art at its full form, at its most interconnected form."

Cunningham continued, "It brings in people from all backgrounds who want to interact with the experience. I don't think you can always say that. There are a lot of spaces that people walk into that they're intimidated by. Maybe they don't feel like they dress the right way, or they don't speak or have enough knowledge about collecting in and of itself. If you now have reached a financial threshold where you're like, 'Hey, I want to collect art,' but you have no idea where to start." Accessibility is at the core of Throughline. Everyone should be able to enjoy art and be celebrated in it.

"When I go to galleries and when I go to museums, if I do see, which is rare, but if I do see a Black or Brown woman on a wall, it's very dull, very muddled, and very muted," Smalls said. Smalls' observations about how Black and Brown women are often portrayed in art is why bright and bold colors are so integral to her work. "To actually see their visceral reaction to it was an emotional experience," Smalls replied. "It was really beautiful, because I think that a lot of them haven't -- no matter what they do, whatever industry they're in, no matter how long they've been doing what they're doing. I don't think that they've all had somebody, and multiple people in this instance and in terms of Throughline, take time to just focus on them and honor them." While the curtain has closed on the show in Oakland, Throughline is not over. Smalls and Cunningham are in talks to bring the series to other parts of the Bay Area, and honor more women in shows in other parts of the country and world.

### **Thursday, December 14, 2023**

### **Oakland's largest menorah to be even bigger with 24-hour security in 2024, Jewish Center says**

There was a moment of prayer, hope and resilience, 24 hours after Oakland's largest menorah was destroyed and thrown in Lake Merritt on the sixth night of Hanukkah. Oakland police are investigating the destruction of the menorah as a possible hate crime. As of Thursday morning, no arrests or suspect information had been released yet. "We decided that the response cannot be that we're

going to cower, or hide. They cannot extinguish our soul. They cannot extinguish our light," said Rabbi Dovid Labkowsky of the Chabad Jewish Center of Oakland. So on Wednesday night, a replacement menorah was re-lit in the same place where the first one stood. And before the lighting, there was a car parade, where vehicle after vehicle could be seen with menorahs on top of them showing signs of support and unity among the Jewish community and others. "It was a beautiful show of unity, and to show that we're not going to hide when anti-semitism happens, but we're going to come out in large numbers and show how proud we are. We're not going to take off our symbols of Judaism. We're going to display them even more," Labkowsky said. They left it up until about 10 p.m. on Wednesday night. But leaving the menorah out overnight wasn't a risk this rabbi was willing to take again. So, they carefully took it down after the re-lighting ceremony before putting it back up again around 9 a.m.

Thursday morning as people cheered from boats in Lake Merritt. "I spoke yesterday to the people cleaning up here, and they said that the graffiti is put on every single day. They keep cleaning it up every single day," he said. "So, we feel like especially during this time, it wouldn't be safe to keep it up. Even if we had security there, I don't know if security would be enough to secure the menorah." Not knowing Rabbi Labkowsky and his team took it down overnight, Jake Wasserman out of Oakland went to bring possible security crews coffee around 3 a.m., until he noticed it wasn't there anymore.

"And so I went home and got some of my production stuff from installation work and came out, built up what I could with tripods and electric votive candles and stuff," Wasserman said. He was inspired by a message of hope he heard during Wednesday night's ceremony. "Things get knocked down in Oakland, and we put them back up again and that's how it goes," he said. "And so knowing their story is going around, it got knocked down and it got put back up again. I didn't like the idea of it looking like it had gone again." As for next year, Rabbi Labkowsky tells ABC7 News he already pre-ordered a 13-foot menorah to replace the 9-foot replacement menorah used this year. And he says they will have 24 hour security. The Oakland Police Department is asking anyone with information to contact the OPD General Crimes Section at (510)-238-3728.