



Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, SoCo United in Crisis has been hard at work on behalf of our communities in Sonoma County. We have lobbied for PPE for health workers, sanitary facilities for homeless people, eviction protection for tenants, and many other issues impacting immigrants, workers, and others. In short, we have committed ourselves to the wellbeing and safety of the most marginalized people in our community – something we thought none of our elected officials could oppose.

This past week, we were outraged when we learned that Sheriff Mark Essick is doing just that. Sheriff Essick's announcement that his deputies will no longer be enforcing our county's public health orders puts our entire community at risk. SoCo United in Crisis condemns in the strongest possible way Essick's cavalier action. Our primary concerns are three-fold:

1. *Sheriff Essick is abusing his power as an elected official.* In a week marred by law enforcement officers willfully overstepping their jurisdiction, Essick is acting well outside of his role as sheriff. In a statement to the *Press Democrat* he asserted that as sheriff, he ought to be included in the policy-making conversations. This could not be further from the truth. His job is *enforcement*. There is a legitimate reason of the separation of these powers, and if he wishes to be in policy-making conversations, he should run for supervisor. And if he no longer wishes to enforce the laws, he should resign from sheriff.
2. *Sheriff Essick's failure to uphold the law has serious consequences for many of us, and disproportionately for youth and communities of color.* In Sonoma County, members of the Latinx community account for four and a half times the cases of COVID-19 positive residents¹. When Essick fails to enforce health orders, we expect the rate of infection to rise. If Essick refuses to protect the community from a virus that is disproportionately impacting youth and communities of color, he sends the message that he does not value their lives more than his own personal opinions about the health orders. If he cannot put his job above his own agenda, Sheriff Essick should resign.

Additionally, the rate of infection of people under the age of 18 in Sonoma County is four times the national average, with 96% reporting as residents from Latin America. Essick is a community leader who is now actively defying our public health officer. If Essick is not taking precautionary

measures seriously, how can we expect young people to do so? If Essick is not willing to act as a leader in our community, he should resign.

3. *During a dire public health emergency Sheriff Essick is wasting the valuable time and resources of our county officials.* Now, more than ever, we need our county Supervisors to be hard at work on behalf of the people of our county, addressing the issues and solutions groups like SoCo United in Crisis are presenting. Essick's initial announcement was political posturing at best and reckless defiance at worst. He willingly took a meeting and compromised with county and Federal representatives, only to then reverse his his position on Facebook. He demonstrated that he does not have the forthrightness or the character to be Sheriff. He must resign immediately.

For over two months SoCo United in Crisis has been making every effort to get our local elected officials to build stronger equity into their COVID19 response. But let us be very clear that nearly every solution on our platform has been presented numerous times to our County and City officials over the last several years since the Tubbs fires. Sheriff Essick's announcement puts our already disenfranchised communities in more danger, but more so because of the lack of action from our elected officials to deal with the inequalities and disparities in our community to begin with. We appreciate the swift response and action from our County to address the Sheriff and the way his decisions create further harm in our community, and we hope that they continue their response with actions that stop the recent evictions, that protect our workers, that support our undocumented community, and that care for our unhoused residents.

¹<https://sonomacounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=21a1653b79ba42039ff22bcb85fa5b19>