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## Lafayette mayor addresses concerns on overpass protest tensions

By Pippa Fisher



Prompted by reports of violence and intimidation on the El Curtola overpass, which has been the scene of pro-Trump protests for several months, Lafayette Mayor Susan Candell released a statement expressing concern, and reassurance that police will continue to monitor the area during the protests and will increase patrols if necessary.

Several members of the public spoke out at the Jan. 11 city council meeting, alleging incidents of harassment and physical attacks, as well as safety concerns over the potential for the large flags hanging over the busy freeway to fall.

Trump supporters on the overpass Jan. 15. Photo Pippa Fisher  $\,$ 

"I wish to address some of the concerns raised over reported conduct on the overpass," said Candell in the statement, released by the city Jan. 14. "Along with our city manager, city attorney, and police chief, I have carefully reviewed the range of lawful responses that we,

as a city, can implement concerning events on the El Curtola overpass. I can say with full confidence that the response by our police department has been appropriate and timely. When violations of the law have been reported, including allegations of assault, the police department has made arrests and our judicial system is processing these matters."

Noting that peaceful forms of protest in public spaces are a bedrock of democracy, Candell said that First Amendment rights must be upheld for everyone, both those living in Lafayette and those who come to Lafayette to express their views.

Addressing calls for the overpass to be closed, Candell said, "Under the law, however, we cannot do this and prohibit lawful protests. Likewise, the city cannot limit access to the overpass to only residents, as has been suggested. All members of the public, no matter where they live, have the right to peacefully assemble on the overpass. If the City of Lafayette were to hinder those rights, it could expose the city to significant legal challenges and, perhaps, make Lafayette a focal point for future protests."

Candell said the city, working with the police will continue to monitor events and will make arrests should any law be violated.

"Let us all do our part to uphold the First Amendment and to deescalate a sensitive situation," said Candell, closing out the statement. "I know that nerves are frayed. But we must come together to ensure that our democracy functions peacefully and respectfully."

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