

REDWOOD CURTAIN COPWATCH

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March 2, 2009

Open Letter To Eureka Police Chief Garr Nielsen,
Eureka City Council members,
Eureka Mayor, and
Eureka City Attorney, Sheryl Schaffner:

Re: EPD Sergeant Rodrigo Reyna-Sanchez

It is with great despair and anger that we write this letter about yet another instance of Eureka Police Department [EPD] Officer Rodrigo Reyna- Sanchez terrorizing members of our community. Redwood Curtain CopWatch received reports from several youth that on or about August 17, 2008, Sanchez entered a supervised teen center, holding a large gun with his *finger on the trigger*, thus creating an intimidating presence and invading the space and personal safety of at least 15 young people and staff.

Redwood Curtain CopWatch was informed that someone at the teen center accidentally set off the "panic alarm" which sent an alert to EPD. Prior to Sanchez and other EPD officers arriving at the teen center in Eureka, center staff was contacted by EPD. The teen center staff informed the police department that everything was fine; that the alarm was set off by accident. *In spite* of the clarifying phone call, Sanchez came to the front door; gun in hand, while 2 or 3 other officers encroached upon the teen center through the large back garden space, as if the building needed to be surrounded.

According to the young witnesses with whom we spoke, the long-time director of the teen center spoke with Sanchez when he arrived at the door, and she *again* informed him that there was no problem, or reason for alarm. When the director went to retrieve ID (demanded by Sanchez), Sanchez entered the building and walked up the stairs, visibly parading his large gun with *his finger on the trigger*, knocking the weapon on the stair railing ominously as he ascended.

These actions not only represent a violation of trust, but a clear danger to constitutional rights of community members. The center has a well-posted policy which prohibits people over the age of 21 from entering without permission. Presumably, the intent of the policy is to maintain and ensure a SAFE SPACE for youth who come from a myriad of circumstances. Youth in the center were frightened, taken by surprise, and felt invaded. Judging from the description we received, which coincides with common descriptions of civilian encounters with Sanchez, Sanchez displayed unfounded hostility through his facial expressions and actions. He wholly defiled the notion of "safety" that has been maintained in the teen center for many years. Sanchez and the accompanying officers (names unknown to us) have, once again, traumatized more members of our community. The officers violated the safety and arguably the constitutional rights of all the people working and/or finding refuge and security in the teen center. Despite the lack of a warrant, or verbal/written permission, or explainable cause, and *after* it was specifically communicated that there was no danger present, Officer Sanchez burst, armed, into the teen center- putting the safety and security of all present at risk.

We are grateful that no one was *physically* hurt as a result of Sanchez' conduct. However, we know that had someone been physically injured, or killed, by Sanchez' carelessness and militarized presence, Sanchez, EPD, the City of Eureka, and the DA would scramble to blame the innocent victims.



Sanchez holding a gun that fits the rough description of that which he carried, finger on the trigger, when he aggressively asserted his presence at the teen center. Photo taken on or about Nov 2, 2005 after Sanchez attacked Kat Zimmerman on her bicycle, who was riding as part of a legal anti-war demonstration. Sanchez injured Kat, a local young college student, and knocked her unconscious. The woman weighed about 100 pounds.

This incident underscores the history of violence endemic within Humboldt County law enforcement. On the heels of the deaths of Christopher Burgess, Martin Cotton, Peter Stewart, and others, this incident suggests a poisonous politic within the departments. Not only are police officers running rampant, void of self-discipline and having no regard for safety and sensitivity, there is also a total lack of supervision and an unwillingness to hold officers accountable for acts of violence. Redwood Curtain CopWatch knows that Sanchez is dangerously and criminally disposed to abusing his authority and inflicting trauma, as described herein, whenever he finds an opportunity. It is an understatement for us to point out how unfortunate it is for the people of Eureka (and other local constituencies) that Sanchez remains armed and on the streets; it is clear he does so primarily due to the inaction and refusal by the City of Eureka and its police chief(s) to protect the public.

Many who suffer from Sanchez' and other EPD officers' intimidation tactics and cruelty are reluctant to speak up about their experiences, fearful of retaliation by the officers (and complicit government officials) who exhibit flagrant disregard for the law, human rights, and the liberty for each of us to live without fear of violent invasion against our bodies and mental well-being. Given the legacy of the Eureka Police Department, victims of Sanchez' unchecked bullying are justified in their fear of further attacks if they publicly expose him and his abhorrent behavior.

Retaliation by police officers is against the law. Despite this fact, criticism and complaints of local police behavior have been met with abuse, imprisonment, and police harassment.

Individuals who have witnessed or been victim to EPD abuse have been threatened, injured, imprisoned, and/or suffered from “mysterious” deaths or disappearances from our community, so that they cannot make their experiences publicly known.

Public scrutiny is necessary to prevent retaliations. It is vital that our community take note of dubious police interactions, be aware of rogue officers, and pay special attention to anyone who is being targeted by the police.

We insist that you take seriously our well-informed notice that *retaliation* has already occurred, and that you stay aware and take rigorous measures to prevent it from occurring in the future.

We demand that Sanchez be immediately prohibited from responding to incidents where youth are present, and from engaging with young people at any time in his official capacity.

Moreover, we hereby call for the immediate initiation of the procedural *expulsion* of Rodrigo Reyna-Sanchez from the Eureka Police Department.

IN TRUE DEFENSE OF THE PEOPLE,

Redwood Curtain CopWatch

*cc: Human Rights Commission, Humboldt County
Civil Liberties Monitoring Project (CLMP)
Jay Moller, Attorney at Law
Humboldt County District Attorney, Paul Gallegos
Humboldt County Board of Supervisors
Office of the Attorney General, Jerry Brown*