**Rosemead City Council Remarks by Steve Gunther**

**October 22, 2024**

Good evening honorable Councilmembers. I am grateful for the opportunity to address the operation and safety measures of our campus and programs, as well as address some of the concerns that have been raised.

Let me first say that I was deeply saddened by the protests at the last meeting. It was especially difficult to see the affect all the anger and shouting had on the young women from our programs who were present to share their stories. As one of our former residents said, “Why do they hate us so much?” It was clear that a great deal of misinformation has been shared as evidenced by YouTube videos and other social media posts. I want to be clear that, as our application clearly states, we are not operating a homeless shelter, and we are not asking to open a 400-bed homeless shelter.

In our mission statement, we talk about lifting up one individual, one family, one community at a time. This is the heart of our work and central to our housing, early childhood education, and community mental health programs which we have been operating for decades here in Rosemead.

In June of 2020 Maryvale made the decision to close our residential treatment program, that was licensed for 72 youth to then focus on temporary housing. The Seton House program, which we began two years ago, currently houses 9 mothers with up to two children under the age of 10 and was a direct response to a need we saw in our community matched with our beautiful facilities and campus. The plan before you would simply add capacity for 20 more moms with their children.

With this program, we have the unique opportunity to provide integrated services – housing, early childhood education, and mental health services – to the young mothers and their children in the program. As I already mentioned, it is vital to understand that we are not operating or proposing to operate a homeless shelter. Seton House is a temporary housing program. It is a hand up, not a handout. Each family comes to us through referring agencies. We have a thorough interviewing process to determine the appropriateness of each referral to our program and each mother’s level of commitment to full participation in the program.

A mother who enters the program must agree and be ready to participate fully in the program which includes following the rules, meeting regularly with a case manager, working on achieving her individual goals, participating in house meetings and classes, and other components of the program. In the first two years, we have seen great success with 71% of the residents transitioning to stable housing. As well as a 70% increase in participants pursuing educational goals after admission into the program. Finally, 55% of our graduates were employed when they left the program. The young women admitted to our program have already taken steps to better their lives and the lives of their children. Our program simply provides them the support, safety, and security to focus on achieving their goals.

At the same time, we place a high priority on the safety of our campus and the well-being of those we serve and of our staff. As you can imagine, with a capacity for 120 children birth to five years in our early education program as well as the young children in our housing program, we are very careful about the programs and services on the campus. As a matter of fact, our Duarte facility currently houses a second early education program for up to 176 children as well as our community mental health programs. Since 2011, we have had no safety issues or concerns with the two programs co-located in the same building.

You have already heard there have been no major incidents on or around the campus these past two years since Seton House opened. Mothers entering the program understand the rules which include no drugs nor drug use, no alcohol, no weapons, smoking, vaping, and no on-site visitors. No one can enter the program building without being let in by a staff member. Residents of the program must be back on campus by 10pm Monday through Thursday and by midnight Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Whenever a resident returns to the program - regardless of the time of day – our staff conduct bag checks which include purses, diaper bags, backpacks, strollers, fanny packs, grocery bags, water bottles, open containers, and unsealed bottles of liquid. In addition, the staff conduct random room checks.

I can assure you; we continually evaluate our safety and security needs and adjust as needed. If we are blessed to receive your support tonight for our plans, we will most definitely be prepared to add additional security on campus when we complete the interior building renovations and begin welcoming additional mothers and their children into the program.

Again, we are not asking to open a 400-bed homeless shelter. Rather, It’s important to remember that once completed, the Seton House program will have a total of 29 temporary units combined with up to 14 residents from Hope Housing. This is 40% fewer residents than Maryvale’s previous capacity under our former residential treatment program. In essence, Maryvale will be operating at a lower capacity than before.

We have heard the concerns raised by some of our neighbors and have made every effort to communicate with them including tours and three open houses. We received a photo from a concerned neighbor about a woman who was in the community, but it was clear from the photo that she was not from our campus. I mention this because we want to always be good neighbors and are always available to hear concerns and will certainly address any issues related to our campus or programs that may arise.

We are grateful for all the support we have received for our programs, especially the Seton House program. This includes a million dollars in funding for the renovations secured by Congresswoman Judy Chu and support from Supervisor Solis.

In the lobby of our administration building, we have a quote from St. Vincent de Paul: “First the heart, then the work!” With your blessing tonight, we will continue to follow his call and provide life changing services to those we are privileged to serve. Thank you for allowing me this time and I am happy to address any questions you may have.