



604 C Street ~ Eureka, CA 95501
www.ci.eureka.ca.gov/depts/police

Stephen Watson
Chief of Police

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2020

Subject: Demonstration at the Humboldt County Courthouse

On September 24, 2020, at about 6:00 p.m., a demonstration related to the Breonna Taylor decision took place on the 5th Street side of the Humboldt County Courthouse. The demonstration was attended by approximately sixty (60) individuals. Eureka Police Department (EPD) personnel monitored the event for the purpose of ensuring that no issues arose that hampered this constitutionally protected activity or posed any significant public safety concerns.

Shortly after the demonstration began, a majority of the group began marching in the roadways. Their route utilized mainly 4th and 5th Streets, but also took them onto other streets in the general area of the courthouse. This activity caused roadway blockages and delayed vehicular traffic. At one point while marching westbound on 4th Street, several members of the group moved existing traffic control items (traffic cones, signage, a digital reader board, etc.) from an active construction area and used it to block all westbound lanes of travel on 4th Street. EPD personnel, assisted by a concerned citizen, quickly removed the items to re-establish the traffic flow.

Also during the marching portion of the event, the Eureka Police Department Communications center received reports of two misdemeanor spray paint vandalisms to businesses being committed by individuals involved in the demonstration, as well as two vehicles that were damaged by demonstrators, while the vehicles were blocked on 5th Street.

As the evening progressed and became darker it became more difficult for motorists to see demonstrators in the roadway, due to many of them wearing all dark clothing and not wearing any type of reflective clothing or carrying lights.

At about 7:36 pm, while demonstrators were blocking eastbound traffic for 5th Street at

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I Street, a vehicle versus pedestrian collision took place. Emergency medical personnel, assisted by EPD personnel, responded to the scene and the pedestrian was provided medical care. An open investigation into the traffic collision is in progress. Preliminary findings indicate that the pedestrian may have placed herself in the path of the vehicle at the time of the collision.



Photo by Kris Nagel, via Kym Kemp's Redheaded Blackbelt blog

As medical and police staff were addressing the traffic collision, a heated exchange took place between several members of the demonstration. This went on for several minutes and ended with the demonstration self-disbursing. The demonstration concluded at about 7:57 p.m.

The Eureka Police Department would like to remind the public that not only is it unsafe for pedestrians to step into or to walk down active roadways, but California Vehicle Code 21954(a) states: *“Every pedestrian upon a roadway at any point other than within a marked crosswalk or within an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection shall yield the right-of-way to all vehicles upon the roadway so near as to constitute an immediate hazard.”* Additionally, motorists need to remember that California Vehicle Code 21954(b) states: *“The provisions of this section shall not relieve the driver of a vehicle from the duty to exercise due care for the safety of any pedestrian upon a roadway.”*

Eureka Police Chief Steve Watson: *“We have endeavored to remain understanding and adaptable while giving fairly broad latitude in accommodating and safeguarding these demonstrations during this pivotal time as our country confronts these important issues.*

However, it is important to understand EPD cannot insure the safety of those who choose to disregard the law by intentionally stepping in front of vehicles and blocking major streets and intersections. Over the past several months, law enforcement has seen a concerning pattern of protesters purposefully impeding and surrounding the vehicles of uninvolved motorists trapped



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by animated crowds. Several instances have occurred during demonstrations where this intentionally disruptive activity has escalated to some protesters striking, jumping on, and damaging vehicles. There have also been instances where it appears certain drivers have failed to exercise due care for the safety of pedestrians upon the roadway as they attempted to navigate or escape through the crowds. These actions by both pedestrians and drivers have contributed to several reported vehicle versus pedestrian collisions and in some cases injuries. While most demonstrators have been peaceful, this irresponsible and dangerous behavior by a few needs to stop.”

There are active investigations regarding the traffic collisions and vandalisms. Any witnesses to these events are urged to contact the Eureka Police Department at 707-441-4060. Further information will be released as appropriate.

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