

Open Letter Regarding the September 13 Hate-Expression Incident in San Luis Obispo

September 16, 2026

To: Mayor and City Council, City Manager, and Chief of Police, City of San Luis Obispo

For distribution to: Local and regional news media

From: NAACP San Luis Obispo County Branch

Subject: Community response requested following public display of Ku Klux Klan attire

Dear Mayor, City Councilmembers, City Manager, Chief of Police, and Members of the Media:

The NAACP San Luis Obispo County Branch is deeply concerned by the incident reported on Sunday, September 13, 2026, involving an individual wearing what witnesses described as Ku Klux Klan attire in public areas of San Luis Obispo. According to the San Luis Obispo Police Department and local reporting, the incident included a verbal confrontation at Creekside Mobile Home Park and subsequent sightings near the Trader Joe's parking lot and the intersection of Tank Farm Road and South Higuera Street. The individual was arrested for alleged public intoxication. Police stated that available evidence did not substantiate a hate crime and documented the matter as a "non-criminal hate expression."

Regardless of the legal classification, the public display of imagery associated with the Ku Klux Klan carries an unmistakable history of racial terror, intimidation, and violence. Its appearance in shared community spaces can cause fear, compel residents to alter their movements, and undermine the sense of belonging that every person should be able to expect in San Luis Obispo. We stand for and with the Black residents and all community members affected by this disgusting incident.

I appreciate that officers investigated whether the conduct met the legal standard for a hate crime and that the Police Department invited individuals who had contact with the person, or who believe they were targeted, to come forward. At the same time, a conclusion that available evidence did not establish a hate crime should not be understood as a conclusion that the incident was harmless. A strong civic response is necessary to affirm community values, support those affected, and reduce the likelihood of escalation.

Requested Actions

1. **Issue a clear public statement.** We ask City leaders to unequivocally reject racist intimidation and affirm that Black residents, visitors, workers, students, and families belong and deserve safety in every public space.
2. **Provide a transparent factual update.** Without compromising privacy or an active investigation, explain the timeline, the basis for the incident classification, whether additional evidence is being reviewed, and how residents may submit information.
3. **Conduct direct community outreach.** Convene a timely listening session with affected residents, civil-rights organizations, neighborhood representatives, local businesses, and educational institutions to hear concerns and identify practical safety measures.
4. **Strengthen hate-incident response.** Review officer training, evidence preservation, victim support, referral practices, and protocols for documenting conduct that may not meet a criminal threshold but still threatens community trust.
5. **Publish meaningful follow-through.** Share anonymized information about reported hate incidents, response outcomes, available support, and progress on prevention efforts at regular intervals.

We also urge local media to report with precision and appropriate context. Coverage should neither sensationalize hateful symbols nor minimize their impact. We encourage journalists to center affected community voices, distinguish carefully between a hate crime and a hate incident or expression, and provide verified information about reporting and support resources.

Anyone who directly experienced or witnessed threatening, targeted, or harassing conduct should preserve relevant photographs, video, messages, and witness information and report the facts to law enforcement. The City's hate-incident reporting resource states that reports may be made to the San Luis Obispo Police Department at 805-781-7312, including confidential documentation submitted on behalf of another person.

Our branch is prepared to participate in a prompt, constructive meeting with City leadership and community partners. We ask the City to respond publicly within ten business days with the actions it will take and a proposed date for community dialogue. San Luis Obispo must answer symbols of racial terror with clarity, solidarity, transparency, and sustained action.

Sincerely,

Barry W. Stokes

President

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