



County of San Bernardino
Office of the District Attorney
JASON ANDERSON, District Attorney

**San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office Continues Fight
to keep Sexually Violent Predator Lawtis Rhoden out of
San Bernardino County**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, Ca. - Officials have been notified that the Liberty Healthcare Corporation (Liberty) has, for a second time, proposed housing a Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) from Orange County in San Bernardino County – now in Newberry Springs. This is the third time in less than two years that Liberty has proposed placing an SVP from another county in San Bernardino County on supervised release.

The San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office is urging members of the community to share any insights they may have as to why housing a Sexually Violent Predator at 47998 Lake Irene Drive in Newberry Springs is unsafe and unacceptable.

Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) Lawtis Donald Rhoden has no ties to San Bernardino County and his most recent crimes were committed in Orange County, Los Angeles County, and Tennessee. Rhoden was also committed to the Department of State Hospitals following his SVP trial in Orange County.

Liberty's proposal comes just weeks after the Orange County Superior Court rejected Liberty's previous proposal to have Rhoden live in Twentynine Palms due to safety concerns. That decision came after an exhaustive investigation by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and 11 weeks of courtroom litigation led by prosecutors from the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office.

Despite the court's order to continue searching for housing for Rhoden in Orange County and Los Angeles County, where he committed his crimes and was prosecuted, Liberty very quickly resumed seeking his placement in San Bernardino County.

Rhoden committed multiple rapes of children. In Cocoa Beach, Florida in 1969, he lured a 13-year-old victim back to his apartment and raped her on three separate occasions. Rhoden was convicted through a plea agreement of one felony lewd and lascivious acts with a child under the age of 14 years and sentenced to 14 months in a state mental hospital and 12 years in state prison. Rhoden was treated in the state mental hospital for his inability to control his sexual drive for young girls and, although he had the opportunity to do so, he did not attempt to obtain assistance for himself following his release. After serving his prison sentence, he was paroled.

While on parole, Rhoden sexually assaulted four children in two states. Rhoden was convicted of rape by force, forceful sexual penetration, sexual battery, and two counts of forcible rape stemming from crimes he committed in Orange County and Los Angeles County, California in April and June 1984. These sexual assaults were committed in three separate incidents against two 14-year-old girls and one 17-year-old girl.

While those crimes were under investigation, Rhoden went to Nashville, Tennessee where he sexually assaulted a 13-year-old girl in December 1984 and was subsequently convicted of rape and use of a minor for obscene purposes. In all four instances of sexual assault, Rhoden held himself out as a photographer and, to lure in his victims, offered them modeling photoshoots. Rhoden drove up to each of his three sexual assault victims in Orange County and Los Angeles County while they were on foot when attempting to entice them into his car.

The State of Tennessee sentenced Rhoden to 20 years in state prison, the Orange County Superior Court sentenced him to 12 years in state prison, and the Los Angeles County Superior Court sentenced him to six years in state prison.

From March of 1983 until his arrest in Tennessee, Rhoden also defrauded people in California, Florida and Texas of approximately \$440,000. The major scheme involved inserting personal ads in newspapers, creating a relationship with women answering the ads, holding himself out as an investment broker or lawyer, and convincing the women as well as their friends to provide him with large sums of money to invest.

Rhoden was released from state prison in 2004 and detained in the Orange County jail based on an SVP petition filed by the Orange County District Attorney's Office. He was later found by an Orange County jury to be a Sexually Violent Predator under the state Welfare & Institutions Code and committed to the Department of State Hospitals for treatment.

On October 25, 2019, the Orange County Superior Court ordered Rhoden conditionally released into the community under the supervision of the Liberty Healthcare Corporation.

On February 5, 2021, based on Liberty's representations they could not find housing for Rhoden in Orange County, the Orange County Superior Court found "extraordinary circumstances" existed to authorize relocating Rhoden to a neighboring county.

On March 12, 2021, Liberty proposed ordering Rhoden to live at a residence in Twentynine Palms. San Bernardino County District Attorney Jason Anderson, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, and other municipal, county, and federal officials strongly objected to that proposed placement.

On May 27, 2021, after receiving public comments from local officials and concerned members of the community, the Orange County Superior Court rejected the proposed order for Rhoden to live in Twentynine Palms.

On July 9, 2021, Liberty returned to court and proposed ordering Rhoden to live at a Newberry Springs residence in San Bernardino County. Sheriff Shannon Dicus has ordered deputies to once again undertake

a thorough investigation and District Attorney Jason Anderson has directed prosecutors from his own SVP Unit to appear before the Orange County Superior Court on September 2 and oppose Rhoden's release into to our community.

How you can help:

Attend a COVID-compliant town hall meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday August 4, 2021 @ 6:30 p.m. at: 30884 Newberry Rd., Newberry Springs, CA

You may email concerns and opinions to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department at paffairs@sbcasd.org or send a letter to:

San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office
303 West 3rd Street, 4th Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0511
Attn: Deputy District Attorney Maureen O'Connell

Deputies from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, Barstow Station will be going door-to-door, beginning Monday, July 26, in the immediate vicinity of where the proposed residence will be. They will attempt to contact several residents within the community to gather key demographics and vital information to oppose the relocation of the sexually violent predator.

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