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## INVESTIGATION INTO GROCERY STORE INCIDENT - SANTEE

On Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, a man entered the Vons in Santee wearing a white pointed hood. Investigators with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department were contacted and have interrogated the man who wore the hood. The man expressed frustration with the coronavirus and having people tell him what he can and cannot do. He said that wearing the hood was not intended to be a racial statement. In summary he said, "It was a mask and it was stupid."

After the interrogation, detectives conferred with both the U.S. Attorney's Office and the San Diego County District Attorney's Office. Witnesses to the incident were interviewed and video evidence was scrutinized. An analysis of all relevant criminal statutes was undertaken. As a result, it was determined there was insufficient evidence to charge the man who wore the Ku Klux Klan hood inside the store.

The U.S. Supreme Court has said that "[s]peech that demeans on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, or any other similar ground is hateful; but the proudest boast of our free speech jurisprudence is that we protect the freedom to express the thought that we hate."

That said, this incident should serve as a reminder for anyone contemplating wearing or displaying items so closely associated with hate and human suffering that our society does not hold in high regard those who do so. Santee is a city of families and the community is rightfully disgusted at this man's despicable behavior. The Sheriff's Department thoroughly investigates incidents such as these and will hold those who violate the law accountable.

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