

June 10, 2019

Honorable Herb Wesson
Los Angeles City Council President
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St., Room 430

RECEIVED
JUN 11 2019
BY: M.V.

RE: Council File 19-0002-S50 (Resolution in Opposition to AB 516)

Dear Council President Wesson:

We, the undersigned civil rights, religious and community-based organizations, were disappointed to learn that there is a resolution currently pending before the City Council that would oppose AB 516 (Chiu). Our organizations strongly support AB 516, which will help Californians who are struggling to make ends meet by putting an end to towing practices that disproportionately affect low-income people in our community. Given the positive impact that AB 516 would have on the Los Angeles community, the City Council should support, not oppose, AB 516.

Current state law allows vehicles to be towed when a person's vehicle registration has been expired for more than six months, when a person has five or more unpaid parking tickets, or when a vehicle has been parked in the same location for more than 72 hours. These "poverty tows" are not done for public safety reasons, and the impact is felt primarily by low-income people. AB 516 would eliminate poverty tows, while at the same time preserve other tools the City has at its disposal to address unpaid parking tickets and expired vehicle registration, and to remove abandoned vehicles from neighborhoods.

AB 516 will provide much-needed relief to low-income members of our community, who are particularly vulnerable to the towing practices that would be eliminated by AB 516. As highlighted in a recent report by legal services providers and advocates, "Towed into Debt,"¹ in Los Angeles and throughout California, low-income individuals in Los Angeles and throughout California often cannot afford the high cost of parking tickets, registration fees, or private parking garages. A single unpaid parking ticket, which can prevent them from being able to register their vehicles, or a single mistake of leaving their vehicle in one spot for 72 hours, can leave them susceptible to towing.

If that happens, individuals are subject to cascading fees and fines stemming from the tow. In Los Angeles, getting one's car back after it has been towed costs at least \$287.00, in addition to the payment of all outstanding parking tickets and vehicle registration fees. The longer a car stays at the tow yard, the more it costs to get a car back. After just three days, the cost of a tow can balloon to nearly \$400.00. After two weeks, the cost is almost \$900.00.

¹ "Towed into Debt", March 18, 2019, available at <https://baylegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TowedIntoDebt.pdf>.

With the high cost of living in Los Angeles, many low-income individuals simply cannot afford to retrieve their cars after they are towed. For these individuals, a single tow can put their car out of reach for good. The tow yard then sells these vehicles at a lien sale to cover the cost of the tow and related storage fees and costs. When this happens, everyone loses: the tow yard fails to recoup its costs; Los Angeles never collects the minor debt it sought to collect by ordering the tow; and the individual loses an important asset and method of transportation.

Among the thousands affected by poverty tows each year are:

- Mary, an interior designer who was laid off from her job and struggled to pay the bills. While she was out of work, she received parking tickets she couldn't pay and her car was towed. Mary eventually needed more than \$1,800 to retrieve her car. Because she could not afford this cost, the tow yard sold her car at auction and filed a lien against her for the balance, damaging her credit. Without a vehicle, it became impossible to find a new job, and Mary was forced to declare bankruptcy. Mary remains unemployed and is still without a car needed to do her job.
- Miguel, a Los Angeles resident who survives on public benefits. Miguel is 74 years old, uses a walker, and relies on his wife to care for him. The vehicle registration on Miguel's car lapsed after he was unable to pay the fines from traffic tickets, and the County of Los Angeles placed a hold on the vehicle. While Miguel was at a medical appointment, his car was towed from the county hospital's parking lot. When he could not pay the cost of the parking tickets, registration, towing and storage fees, the vehicle was sold at auction, and he received a \$1,674 deficiency bill from the towing company. Without a car, Miguel has no way to get to his medical appointments or to do any of the other daily chores for which a car is often necessary in Los Angeles.²

As Mary's and Miguel's experiences illustrate, a tow can lead to devastating economic consequences for low-income individuals. In Los Angeles alone, nearly 3.9 million people rely on private vehicles to get to work, and more than half of all school children rely on private vehicles to get to school. Having a vehicle towed is disruptive to every Californian. The loss of a vehicle can lead to the loss of a job, which can in turn lead to the loss of a home. This is particularly true here in Los Angeles, where far too many of our residents are living on a razor's edge, and a single financial hardship can push them into homelessness.

Over the past few years, Los Angeles has created programs to assist low-income people who incur parking tickets. But while programs like the Community Assistance Parking Program (CAPP) and parking ticket payment plans may be helpful to some Angelenos, they do not eliminate the harm caused by these poverty tows. CAPP is available only to people who are homeless and, therefore, does not help the millions of low-income residents who are currently

² *Id.* at 6.

housed but are struggling to make ends' meet. Similarly, LA DOT offers limited payment plan options, but enrollment caps and onerous payment schedules make them inaccessible to most residents who need it the most. Even with these programs, the number of tows and lien sales in Los Angeles has increased every year for the past four years.

AB 516 represents the state's latest effort to eliminate unfair and counterproductive traffic enforcement practices that contribute to a cycle of poverty for low-income residents. In 2017, the Legislature enacted AB 103, which eliminated driver's license suspensions for failure to pay traffic fines and fees. Likewise, in 2017, the Judicial Council announced a series of reforms to traffic court rules to help ensure that fines and fees are set in accordance with a person's ability to pay them. AB 516 presents the next critical reform to eliminate traffic enforcement practices that serve no public safety purpose and merely punish residents for their poverty.

Far too many Angelenos are struggling financially. Losing a vehicle because of an unpaid parking ticket or leaving a car in one place for too long can easily start a ripple effect that leads to homelessness. Given the current housing crisis in Los Angeles, we should be doing everything we can to prevent homelessness. One simple and sensible step is to reserve towing for those instances in which it is necessary for the public good. The poverty tows eliminated by AB 516 simply do not meet this standard. Therefore, the below-signed groups strongly support AB 516 and the effort to eliminate poverty tows. We encourage you to support, not oppose the bill.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Southern California
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
Asians Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles
Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)
Coalition of Humane Immigrants' Rights Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Homeboy Industries
Let's Get Free L.A. Coalition
Public Counsel
National Immigration Law Center
UCLA Labor Center
Western Center on Law and Poverty
Youth Justice Center

CC: City Council File 19-0002-S50



June 10, 2109

Honorable. Herb J. Wesson
Los Angeles City Council President
Honorable Nury Martinez
Los Angeles City Council President Pro Tempore
200 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RECEIVED
JUN 11 2019
BY: M.V.

RE: **Council File 19-0002-S50, Response to Report of the
Chief Legislative Analyst**

Dear Council President Wesson and President Pro Tempore Martinez:

We understand the City Council will be considering a resolution to oppose AB 516 (Chiu), which would end towing of vehicles for three reasons that are unrelated to public safety, and which disproportionately affect low-income Californians. The introduction of the bill followed the release of a report by legal organizations throughout California, including our organizations, on the impact of these forms of towing on our clients.¹

We also understand that, as part of the Council's consideration of that resolution, the Council will review and consider a report from the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) regarding the impacts of the bill. We write to raise serious concerns about the information presented by the CLA in its report.

The CLA report is misleading, contains inaccurate information, and does a disservice to members of the City Council, who must make important decisions that impact all Los Angeles residents, including our clients, who are often the most economically disadvantaged residents of this City.

I. AB 516 Does Not Change LA's Ability To Tow Abandoned Vehicles

The CLA Report states that "AB 516 would also make it impossible to tow vehicles abandoned in the public right-of way."² This is simply not accurate.

¹ "Towed into Debt: How Towing Practices in California Punish Poor People," March 18, 2019, available at <https://wclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TowedIntoDebt.Report.pdf>

² Report of the Chief Legislative Analyst re: AB 516, Assignment No. 19-04-039, Council File No. 19-0002-S50 (CLA Report), at p. 2.

Section 22669 of the Vehicle Code explicitly allows for the towing of abandoned vehicles. AB 516 would have no impact on this provision. Section 22669 states that:

Any peace officer, . . . or any other employee of the state, county, or city designated by an agency or department of the state or the board of supervisors or city council to perform this function, in the territorial limits in which the officer or employee is authorized to act, who has reasonable grounds to believe that the vehicle has been abandoned, as determined pursuant to Section 22523, may remove the vehicle from a highway or from public or private property.³

Section 22523 of the Vehicle Code also expressly prohibits the abandonment of vehicles on public property, and allows the City to recover the cost of towing and storage of the abandoned vehicle and to fine the owner of the vehicle. This too will not change under AB 516.

II. AB 516 Does Not Change LA's Authority To Abate And Remove Abandoned, Wrecked, Dismantled, Or Inoperative Vehicles

Additionally, AB will not affect Los Angeles's authority to abate and remove abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative vehicles from city streets.

Section 22669(d) of the Vehicle Code provides that:

Motor vehicles which are parked, resting, or otherwise immobilized on any highway or public right-of-way and which lack an engine, transmission, wheels, tires, doors, windshield, or any other part or equipment necessary to operate safely on the highways of this state, are hereby declared a hazard to public health, safety, and welfare and may be removed immediately upon discovery by a peace officer or other designated employee of the state, county, or city.⁴

In addition, Section 22660 of the Vehicle Code allows Los Angeles to "adopt an ordinance establishing procedures for the abatement and removal, as public nuisances, of abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative vehicles or parts thereof from private or public property, and for the recovery, pursuant to Section 25845 or 38773.5 of the Government Code, or assumption by the local authority, of costs of administration and the removal."⁵

In fact, Los Angeles has adopted such an ordinance: Section 19.90 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code allows the City to abate and remove "abandoned, wrecked, dismantled or inoperative vehicles" on public property.⁶

³ Ca. Veh. Code § 22669(a)

⁴ Ca. Veh. Code § 22669(d)

⁵ Ca. Veh. Code § 22660

⁶ Los Angeles Administrative Code, Section 19.90 *et seq.* Under Section 19.90, "Any abandoned, wrecked, dismantled or inoperative vehicle which is kept, stored or accumulated or maintained on private property or on public property (except highways) owned by the City of Los Angeles and which contributes to neighborhood blight and deterioration, or which creates a fire hazard or a hazard to the health and safety of minors, or which creates a harborage for

AB 516 does not alter the City's authority under Vehicle Codes 22669(d) or 22660, or Section 19.90 of the Administrative Code, to tow abandoned, wrecked, dismantled or inoperative vehicles.

III. AB 516 Leaves In Place Ample State Law Authority to Tow Vehicles to Address Public Safety Issues

The CLA report states that, if AB 516 passes, state law will "only continu[e] to allow for [towing] in very narrow circumstances."⁷

This too is inaccurate. AB 516 leaves in place broad bases for towing, including that the vehicle has been abandoned and to ensure the flow of traffic. Among the bases for towing that AB 516 leaves unaffected are:

- vehicles that have been abandoned;⁸
- vehicles that are parked in public and missing parts that make the operation of the vehicle unsafe, including tires, windshields, etc.;⁹
- vehicles that are blocking the flow of traffic or interrupting city services;¹⁰
- vehicles that are used as mobile billboard advertising displays;¹¹
- vehicles found illegally parked, where there are no license plates or other evidence of registration on the car;¹² and
- vehicles using a license plate, registration card, identification card, temporary receipt that was not issued for that vehicle, or is not otherwise lawfully used on that vehicle under the Vehicle Code.¹³

In addition, the Vehicle Code gives broad authority to jurisdictions to pass restrictions on parking and allow the authorization of the removal of vehicles,¹⁴ which the City Council has

rodents, insects and other pests, or which is otherwise injurious to the public health, safety and welfare, is hereby declared to be a public nuisance which may be abated in accordance with the provisions of this chapter."

⁷ CLA Report at p. 2.

⁸ Ca. Veh. Code § 22669(a)

⁹ Ca. Veh. Code § 22669(d)

¹⁰ Ca. Veh. Code § 22651(a)-(g)

¹¹ Ca. Veh. Code § 22651(v). This provision allows a city to pass an ordinance regulating mobile billboards, which Los Angeles has done. See LAMC § 87.53 ("Any peace officer or any regularly employed and salaried employee of the City who is authorized to engage and is engaged in directing traffic or enforcing parking laws and regulations may remove, or cause to be removed, the mobile billboard advertising display, and anything that the mobile billboard display is attached to including a motor vehicle, located within the territorial limits of the City when the mobile billboard advertising display is found upon any public street or any public lands").

¹² Ca. Veh. Code § 22651(j)

¹³ Ca. Veh. Code § 22659(o)(3)

¹⁴ Ca. Veh. Code § 22651(m)

done throughout the city of Los Angeles.

AB 516 has no impact on any of these broad bases for the removal of vehicles. Instead, it focuses only on three narrow bases for towing. These bases do not assist the City in collecting outstanding fees and fines, but they do disproportionately impact low-income people.

IV. Programs Designed To Address Parking Tickets Like CAPP And LA DOT's Payment Plans Are Inaccessible To Most Low-Income Angelinos

The CLA suggests that AB 516 reforms are unnecessary because other programs in Los Angeles, including the CAP program and “indigent payment plans” in Los Angeles are available to assist low-income residents.¹⁵ This overstates the relief these programs provide and ignores the limited nature of the programs.

First, CAPP is inaccessible for most low-income people in Los Angeles. By design, the CAPP program is available only to individuals who are *already* homeless. While CAPP is a necessary program that provides relief to some residents of Los Angeles who need it, the vast majority of individuals who are subject to poverty tows are not homeless. They are low-income and struggling every day to not fall into homelessness. For these residents of Los Angeles, CAPP provides no relief.

Even for individuals who may be eligible for the program, CAPP is still relatively unknown. Based on our extensive experience working with clients who are homeless, many, if not most people who may be eligible for the program do not know about it, and we have heard reports that even many police officers that issue parking tickets are not aware of this option.

Moreover, if an individual's vehicle is towed before they enroll in CAPP, or even after they are enrolled in CAPP, the program does not provide meaningful assistance for the individual to get their car back. While a person whose car has been towed can still enroll in CAPP, but they must pay for all the towing charges, which can be in the hundreds of dollars, as well as 40% of the outstanding parking ticket debt. These payments must be completed before the person can even get their car back. Because most individuals who are homeless lack the resources to make these payments, CAPP's requirements make the program prohibitively expensive. who is homeless, As a result, most individuals who are homeless wind up losing their vehicles within the first year of becoming homeless. This in turn makes it even more difficult for a person to move out of homelessness.

The CLA also references a “payment plan for indigent individuals”, but that program, as implemented, is inaccessible to most people who need it. The current payment plan allows only individuals with less than \$300.00 in fines to enroll in the plan. Los Angeles has one of the highest parking ticket base fines in the state. As a result, a person who has more than four regular parking tickets cannot enroll in the extended payment plan. This means that payment plans are out of reach for people who have five or more tickets, the individuals who would be affected by AB 516's reforms.

¹⁵ CLA Report at p. 2

V. The CLA Report Ignores the Economic Reality Facing Low-Income Californians

Finally, while the CLA notes that “supporters of AB 516 believe that towing and immobilization of vehicles negatively impacts the poor,” the report otherwise completely ignores the economic reality facing low-income Angelenos and the catastrophic impact a tow can have on individuals who are struggling to stay housed in the midst of Los Angeles’s housing crisis. Instead, the CLA report suggests that individuals whose vehicles are towed are “scofflaws” who could avoid towing by avoiding parking illegally or by paying their parking tickets.

The City of Los Angeles issues a staggering 1.6 million tickets every year. Parking tickets are disproportionately issued in neighborhoods with larger populations of Black residents, young residents, and renters.¹⁶ And as all residents of Los Angeles who drive in this city well know, parking tickets can be issued for minor violations that stem from everyday mistakes, such as misreading a parking sign or underpaying at a parking meter.

For people who can afford to pay a parking ticket, a ticket is a minor annoyance. For our clients, the impact can start a downward spiral that can and does lead to homelessness. When a person gets a single parking ticket, the cost is \$68.00—nearly an entire day’s pay for someone working a minimum wage job. If that ticket is not paid in time, the late fees can lead to a single ticket costing over \$200.00. If a person is unable to pay the ticket by the time they need to re-register their vehicle, the City can and does place a hold on their registration. After six months, under existing law, the car can be towed for having an expired registration.

In Los Angeles, the cost of a tow is at a minimum, \$287.00. If a person cannot get their vehicle back within 72 hours, those fines increase to \$384.95. After seven days, the amount due is \$567.55.¹⁷ This is in addition to any outstanding parking tickets and vehicle registration fees, which must be paid before the vehicle can be release.

It would take more than three 8-hour days of work at minimum wage to cover just the base fines and fees associated with a tow. This kind of financial outlay is simply out of reach for a low-income family that is struggling just to get by.

As a result, of the more than 100,000 vehicles towed in Los Angeles every year,¹⁸ more than 20% are sold at lien sales. More than 95% of the vehicles sold have a value of less than \$4000.00. In these instances, the City is unlikely recoup any of the lien sale proceeds to pay for

¹⁶ Brazil, Noli, “The Unequal Spatial Distribution of City Government Fines: The Case of Parking Tickets in Los Angeles,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 2018.

¹⁷ “Towed into Debt” at p. 8.

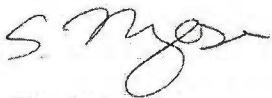
¹⁸ As part of our research for “Towed into Debt,” we made repeated requests for data from the LAPD and LA DOT for public records related to towing, in order to enable the team to conduct a more in-depth analysis regarding the bases for towing in Los Angeles and the impact of these tows on low-income communities. The Los Angeles Police Department refused to provide this data, and to date, LA DOT has still failed to respond to the requests for information.

the outstanding parking tickets. Nonetheless, the cost to the individual who lost their vehicle is significant. More than 3.9 million Angelenos rely on private vehicles to get to work, and half of all school children go to school in a private car. The loss of a car can lead to the loss of a job, which in today's affordable housing crisis, can far too easily lead to homelessness.

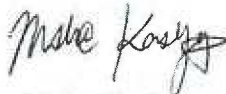
Given the high price that Angelenos are paying for poverty tows and the impact it is having on our clients, it is imperative that the City Council have a full picture and accurate information as it considers its position on this bill.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

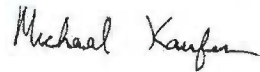
Sincerely,



Shayla Myers
Attorney
Legal Aid Foundation
of Los Angeles



Nisha Kashyap
Staff Attorney
Public Counsel



Michael J. Kaufman
Staff Attorney
ACLU of Southern California

CC: City Council File 19-0002-S50

Hon. Mayor Eric Garcetti
Hon. Gilbert Cedillo
Hon. Paul Krekorian
Hon. Bob Blumenfield
Hon. David E. Ryu
Hon. Paul Koretz
Hon. Monica Rodriguez
Hon. Marqueece Harris-Dawson
Hon. Curren D. Price, Jr.
Hon. Mike Bonin
Hon. Greig Smith
Hon. Mitch O'Farrell
Hon. Jose Huizar
Hon. Joe Buiscaino

19-0002-550

RECEIVED
JUN 11 2019

Dear Councilman Blumenfeld,

BY: _____

My name is Cynthia. I have a wonderful husband and two beautiful children, a girl and a boy of 3 and 1, respectively. I am of the fourth generation in my family to live in our house here in Canoga Park. The first and second generation, my great-grandfather and my grandmother, came here from Zacatecas Mexico. My mom still has their green cards. My dad tells stories about growing up here on the farm and getting into scuffles with the chickens while gathering eggs. Though they have long been gone, my great-grandfather and my grandmother probably still watch over us here in the house that they built back in the fifties, when the river still flowed. My parents raised my eldest siblings in this house. My brothers used to play in this neighborhood without fear. But that is not the case for my children. My children, the fifth generation, do not get to live in a neighborhood like that, even though this is the same wonderful house with a wealth of memories throughout the decades. All of the memories, the legacy, the history.....it means much less when my children are unsafe.

You see, our neighborhood is no longer ours. When I look out the window or my front door, I see tents, shopping carts, trash, trailers, and motor homes. Every time I look, I feel stress, anxiety, frustration, depression....and I have to look constantly in order to make sure that my family is safe. My husband does the same. We are living in a state of chronic-stress and anxiety. It is a well-established fact in the scientific-community that stress kills:

From WebMD: What Are the Consequences of Long-Term Stress?

A little stress every now and then is not something to be concerned about. Ongoing, chronic stress, however, can cause or exacerbate many serious health problems, including:

- Mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and personality disorders
- Cardiovascular disease, including heart disease, high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms, heart attacks, and stroke
- Obesity and other eating disorders
- Menstrual problems
- Sexual dysfunction, such as impotence and premature ejaculation in men and loss of sexual desire in both men and women
- Skin and hair problems, such as acne, psoriasis, and eczema, and permanent hair loss

- Gastrointestinal problems, such as GERD, gastritis, ulcerative colitis, and irritable colon

I can tell you without any hesitation that my husband and I are both suffering with several of these health problems and it is directly linked to the policies of this city. We basically always feel ill and awful because of it. Every time I look out the windows, probably at least fifty or sixty times a day, I feel ill....but I have to keep my family safe, so I have to be diligent. We know for a fact that we are not the only ones. Over the last five years especially, we have seen and been through more horrible, scary, sickening, and disturbing experiences than I care to recall, hearing similar stories and experiences, and worse, from our neighbors. Given the fact that we are not alone in these experiences, I know that we are not alone in our suffering and in our physical and emotional illnesses stemming from this problem. This city has become a city of the ill and suffering, and I am not just talking about the people on the streets. It is people, like me, who just want a safe home for their families, who have been screaming for help, but feel unheard and uncared for by this city.

So what is the problem?

It has been mislabeled for so long that it has not been handled correctly. It is not a problem of homelessness. To limit our terminology thus continues the misinformation of what the real problem is. The problem is drug-addiction and mental-illness. Until we can speak the truth on this issue, until we can separate right from left and left from right, until we can remove the politics from this problem and really deal with it head on, nothing will change. We need to stop throwing money at the wrong problem.

You don't keep offering water to a hungry person. Why keep trying to provide shelter to the mentally-ill and drug-addicted when the problem is mental-illness and drug-addiction?

We have compassion for the mentally-ill and drug-addicted who live on the streets. They aren't all bad people and people can do bad things without themselves being evil. It hurts me to think of others suffering. When we can, we volunteer to feed those in need and we donate money to charitable causes who help those less fortunate. We feel for those who are sleeping on the hard pavement, tents, sleeping bags, you name it. We wouldn't wish it on anyone....but where is the compassion for us? What about the compassion for my family, who feels like we are constantly under siege? Why is it ok for my children to have to stay inside all of the time so that they don't have to be exposed to

the ugliness outside? Worse yet, how is it fair to them that they hardly get to leave this house because their parents don't feel safe leaving it unattended? Why do my children have to deal with anxious, depressed, and forever distracted parents, looking out the windows instead of spending time with them? The policies of this city, and more cities like ours, are creating mental illness for the people living within these affected areas.

You cannot say that you are a compassionate person, but then be so selective about who deserves compassion. WE ALL DO.

So where is the compassion for my beautiful children and why do they have to live walking distance from unsafe conditions because their parents can't afford to live in Beverly Hills or Malibu?

The truth is that these issues are disproportionately affecting middle to lower income neighborhoods, particularly more ethnic neighborhoods, such as my own. That being said, the problems in the city have gotten so out of hand that it is evident regardless of how close you live to it.

We realize that we take great personal risk in writing this and, in fact, in taking any action in regards to these issues at all. We know what people are going to say because we have already heard it. We know this already but, unless you have lived where we have lived, have had to deal with the problems that we have had to deal with, had to call the police for help as many times as we have called, and had to figure out how to climb a seemingly impossible bureaucratic wall to get any help at all, no one has a right to judge. We also know how many more people are suffering the way that we are and how many people are feeling unheard and uncared for by the policies and lack of response to what has become a problem of epidemic proportions, so I guess if I have to take a chance of being attacked for writing this, I will take it for my kids and I will take it for the other people suffering as we are. I will take a chance for this city.

Truly, I feel deep sadness for this once beautiful city. What was a humanitarian approach to a large scale problem has resulted in a less than humanitarian devastation to the appearance of the city and the well-being of her citizenry. Her face is marred by trash and misery. Anyone who visits sees her like this and she has become known more now for the misery than for her former beauty. Her people are sick and suffering, the ones on the streets and the ones in their homes. Is this the legacy of Los Angeles that should be promoted?

My husband drives all over the city for work as part of his job. The people that he encounters, particularly those from out of town, frequently comment and are shocked by the state of our city. It can't be hidden or swept under the rug anymore.

In our neighborhood, as is in so many others, the problems continue to spiral out of control. When the community sees a street like ours starting to get trashy, more and more shady elements move in, and the civic pride evaporates. My husband found a bong that had been ditched on our parkway a few weeks back. Someone dumped a bed frame on our parkway days later. The other day, I found a syringe cap in our parkway....right outside our house where our precious babies live. People drive up in our neighborhood, pull up outside of our house, do drugs, leave trash, and drive off without consequence. The police are so bogged down with their calls that they can't get always here on time whenever I call....and I have to call a lot. When things like these are happening, unless you have lived the life that we have been living, you can't imagine what it feels like and the process that you have to go through, knowing that the police can only do so much to help because their hands are tied behind their backs. So, this less than five-foot tall woman that I am has to contemplate if I should risk my own safety for my family. There have been multiple times when I have had to personally confront problem behaviors AND CRIMINAL behaviors as soon as I see them starting. Sometimes it goes ok. Other times it has been a scary confrontation. I have been extremely fortunate that I have not been hurt....yet....but I always worry about further issues.

I have had to really stay away from confronting it myself as of late because I can't risk it coming back to my children. So, we have to rely on the police. Each time that we do, it is to try to help the community, to make us safe, but it is also because we know that the police will approach the situation with compassion for the person but with community safety in mind, as well. We are requesting agents of good. They have the information and resources that we do not, so the officers can actually offer help that we cannot. They can safely address the issues in ways that we cannot.

From what I understand, the amount of calls that the police receive has drastically increased. The calls in regards to issues related to the mentally-ill and drug-addicted has increased to well over half of all calls received in LA City. There are three vital facts herein:

1. This issue is disproportionately affecting our city
2. It is taking time and resources away from the other important peacekeeping work of our officers and from the community itself

3. Our officers are one of our best resources on what is going on in each community and are an invaluable resource on how to address it

That last one is key. The officers must be allowed to speak to their real world experience with these issues without fear of reprisal or threat to their employment. When they took their jobs they committed themselves to helping and protecting their community. So let them help and let them protect by working with them.

A plan must be put in place to address this problem, but here is the thing: People have to be ready to get well, you cannot force wellness on them, but if they are refusing help, they are choosing that life of misery or they are TOO SICK TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE. Each of us individuals has protected rights, absolutely, but we must be able to find a way to help those that are too lost in their illnesses to see any hope of recovery or a new life. We have to do this for the individual but also in order to protect the safety, health, and well being of the community at large. We have to think about the rights of everyone involved and this involves the whole community. Apparently, some lawmakers are pushing to make "homelessness" a protected class. What about protecting the children within our community and in the neighborhoods who are affected by this epidemic?

Instead, this city, and several others, have become like the mother or the father of a drug addict. They love their child so they coddle and care for the addict, provide shelter, give money that they know may wind up getting used for drugs. They think that they are helping, but ask any drug rehabilitation expert, all it is is enabling. In the meantime, the siblings of the addicted become neglected because the parents spend so much of their time and resources on the addict.

This city, this state, has become an enabler and is neglecting the needs of her other children.

As such, both need an intervention as would the enabling parent. Before making any further plans, before passing any further legislation as is currently being considered, call in drug addiction specialists and mental health practitioners, including police officers. People who are mentally well do not live on the streets or in the conditions that we are seeing every day. They need real help, not to just be told to move elsewhere. That solves nothing. Then it just becomes a problem in another community. We are not for NIMBY attitudes but neither are we for YIMBY attitudes. This isn't about getting people off of our street. It's about getting people OFF OF THE STREET and helping us all live our best lives. We are interested in solutions. We need to know that that is what your

interest is, too, not just appeasement and temporary fixes. Not actions that tow political lines. Not bureaucratic bull crap. We must see real effort for real solutions.

The mentally-ill and drug-addicted of this city need real help now, but the citizens and the businesses of this city need equal effort and action on their behalf. The suffering is just too much and is affecting too many.

So offer help to the mentally-ill and drug-addicted. Recognize that there are some people will be ready for help but that there will also be some who are so ill that their sense of reality is off and, without proactive intervention, they will continue to live in misery. Diagnose them correctly and offer them real help: detox, rehab, and other mental health services. The money needed is already being spent through the current "shelter first" policies, it is just being spent in the reverse order, so give people real opportunities for treatment and the programs that they need to get better. "Shelter first" only perpetuates the problems. Set people in need up for real success by addressing the REAL issues.

Then, understand, as much as you try to help people, there will be some who aren't ready for change and it cannot be forced. From there, if they chose to live on the streets and refuse to get help, then you address the needs of the rest of the community. You treat lawbreakers in homes or not in homes with the exact same standards and apply the same penalties, not the standards of the city now. You clean up the streets and the neighborhoods and you do not allow for the behaviors to continue unfettered as they have been. You let the police do their jobs and keep their communities safe. You let your citizens know that they have been heard and that you care about their needs and their SAFETY. You take back the beauty of this city and bring back the civic pride to her people.

Make the effort to let your community know that you truly are trying to help everyone, but know, there will still be those on the street that you will not be able to help easily or without proactive intervention. That just isn't possible as was evident in the early stages of the Santa Ana River project. Of all of the people who were offered help by intervention specialists, people who said yes and agreed to get help, only two or three out of every ten actually showed up for help. Only 20-30% were ready to accept the help that was being offered. From our personal experiences and the encounters that we have had living in this house in the heart of the problem, we can see how that is possible.

We had to report domestic abuse that we could hear taking place between a couple living in a hoarded motorhome parked up the street from us. They have drifted in and out of

our neighborhood over the years but they recently came back again. She is still with him and they both look more ill and sad than the last time that I saw them. A few years back, we personally tried to intervene on behalf of an elderly man with Alzheimer's disease who was living in his motorhome on our street. His motorhome was broken down and it was so hoarded that he had to sleep hunched over the steering wheel in the driver's seat. He was a nice man but he was obviously suffering and was very advanced in his condition. We called for a welfare check for him based on troubling conversations with him and his lack of resources and personal hygiene, not to mention his lack of sleeping area. He refused the help when it was offered, according to the case worker who I spoke with when I followed up. I was shocked, at the time. I didn't understand how someone who was so clearly in need of help could refuse. I didn't understand how advanced his illnesses were. Some time later he finally received help, but I don't know if he was ready to make the choice or if it had to be made for him. That is something that you will have to prepare for. It will be an uphill battle. But you can't keep letting our city be a safe haven for unsafe behavior.

You won't be able to help all of the people who live in misery on the streets, as much as we all want to see their suffering relieved and for them to live their best lives, but you can help us. You can help my husband get off of the high blood pressure medication that he has to take now because of how stressed out and depressed he is constantly because of the problems in our neighborhood. I have to talk him down all of the time because it seems like there is always something every day that we have to fight against or protect our family from. His depression is affecting every area of his life and it trickles into our marriage because we are both so adversely affected constantly by what is going on right outside our doors. You can help to give me my husband back.

You can help me to not feel so sick to my stomach, anxious, and ready for a fight all of the time. I used to be the person who said hello to everyone that I would see as I walked down the street. That's not me anymore. I am guarded and suspicious of everyone that I see. I used to see motorhomes and get excited, looking forward to the day when our family can get one of our own for traveling in. Now I get anxiety and frustration every time I see motorhomes.

You can help my children, my beautiful children who this is all about. You can give them back their parents, their real parents, not these stressed out shells of our former selves. You can give them back our time as we spend less time looking out the windows, trying to keep them safe.

We aren't well in this state of chronic stress that we are living in. We can relate to the people living in war ravaged countries because, even though our challenges and struggles are very different, we feel that level of chronic stress EVERY DAY right here in the city of Los Angeles. It isn't right.

Change can come with compassion, but your compassion can't just be for the select few. Have compassion for not just the heroin junkie shooting up in the dirty street. Have compassion for the mothers and fathers peering out their windows, hearts racing, desperate for a way to keep their families safe as they see their city fall down around them. Have compassion for the citizens of this city who feel their humanity being stripped away and their sense of community and kindness towards our neighbors robbed as the misery spreads.

This misery and suffering on the streets and within homes, such as mine, has gotten to such a point that when I originally started writing this letter, I had different plans. Originally, I wanted to write my letter, deliver it to my Councilman, and wait to hear the plans of this city on how we were going to get back to a healthier, cleaner, and safer community for all of us. Then this motor home bill, an effort to further limit the ability of the police to protect our neighborhoods. This bill and an incident that occurred last Friday changed my mind.

Around 2pm, I noticed a man across the street from my house. He was obviously on drugs or mentally ill based upon his erratic behavior. I watched out my window, heart pounding, as he paced up and down my street, stopping once pee on a tree. I have kids. We had plans to go to a family celebration that night. Our cars are outside, right by where this erratic man on drugs was pacing. So I called the police. Then I saw him flop out on the dirt directly across from my house. My husband called the paramedics. We watched them drive up, say a few words, and drive by. I called the police again. For a period of THREE HOURS, I watched this man lay in the dirt across the street from my house, listening to music on his phone or ipod, and doing drugs, not marijuana, crack or meth. The police finally arrived. The man immediately stood up, said, "I'm on probation," then, "no, I'm not on probation," then he took off running. These police officers, officers who were fantastic and who we had a very positive interaction with, unfortunately did not pursue this individual. They came back and spoke to us and, through this conversation, I came to realize that these officers are following city policies rather than enforcing the laws. I said that I witnessed the man urinating and doing drugs. They said that those are misdemeanors and did not seem to have any intention of issuing them to the man. They told me that if I want to clean up the city, then help clean up the trash, basically inviting us to pick up the trash the man left behind. I replied that

I do not want to get hepatitis or typhoid so I ask for service on 311.com to which her replied by showing me his gloves. They did clean up the mess but that was kind of it. One of them said to me something to the effect of, "In my experience, they aren't dangerous or trying to harm you," to which I replied, "yeah, but you are a police officer. I am a woman and all of this high," gesturing to my small stature. They both nodded in agreement to that undeniable fact. During the conversation, the officers see the man back up the street and they drive off in that direction. By this point, I have already decided that I am sending my husband to the family celebration without me so that I can look after my house. Thank God I did. The man came back. He was raging. There was an older woman in a tan van that drove him there, possibly his mother, looking very agitated and concerned by his behavior. He got his bike, the only thing left behind, and instead of going with the woman in the van, the woman waiting for him, he chose to stay on the street, outside of my house. I was bawling as I called the police, yet again. I messaged my husband to tell him to stay with family longer in hopes that the man would be gone or the police would be back again before my husband got home with my babies. It was awful.

After that I knew that there is no way that I can rely on the information presented by this city in order to make fair and accurate decisions on this matter. There is not accurate data on this issue because incarcerations and citations that should be enforced or carried out are not happening. I witnessed this personally on Friday night and many other times before. This erratic and dangerous individual, definitely on drugs and possibly mentally ill, was left on the streets, in my neighborhood where I live with my children. The police officers, as wonderful as they were, allowed for this because they were following city policy but, thankfully, there are still many officers who are working for a safe community and working to try to help those who are suffering, like us.

We know that we are not alone in our suffering. We don't deserve to live like this just because we can't afford to live in a more affluent neighborhood. As such, we are reaching out to our family, friends, and the rest of our community. We will be sharing this letter on social media and on other outlets because we need to let others know that they are not alone and that we are calling for action, not just for us, but for them. I am in the process of contacting the Department of Human Health Services and President Donald Trump in the interest of having a State of Emergency declared for the mental-illness and drug-addiction epidemic that is happening on our streets and now in homes as a result of the policies of this city.

Again, people have to be ready to get well, you cannot force wellness on everyone, but if they are refusing help, they are choosing a life of misery or they are too sick to know the difference. But that is not what I choose for my family.

What is your choice?

We look forward to hearing and sharing your response and your plan of action, going forward. That being said, please consider this a Cease and Desist Letter, specifically, stop the current policies of decriminalization and enforce the laws equally to ALL people and without prejudice. We will not stop fighting for our family so we truly hope that you come up with a real plan is solid and will yield results, not further protections for miserable, criminal, dangerous, and/or self-harming behaviors as what is currently being proposed. If not, we will definitely have to pursue other courses of action.

With Resolve, Sincerity, and Hope For Us All,

Cynthia Gurrola-Tidwell