



**NITHYA
RAMAN**

Los Angeles
City Councilmember
4th District

May 5, 2021

City Council Budget and Finance Committee
Attn: Councilmember Paul Krekorian, Chair
200 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: The City's FY 2021-22 Budget

Dear Honorable Chair Krekorian and Members of the Budget and Finance Committee,

Thank you for your continued efforts in reviewing the Mayor's proposed annual budget. I am encouraged by the direction we are heading as a City. The proposed budget makes a greater investment than ever before in addressing homelessness—recognizing the scale and severity of the crisis and marshalling much-needed resources for services and the provision and construction of interim and permanent housing. The investments in alternatives to policing such as crisis response teams and community intervention workers also suggest that we are taking the project of reimagining public safety seriously.

Still, I believe we have further to go. Angelenos are reeling from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit working families and communities of color harder than anyone else. We must use federal recovery funds to the greatest degree we responsibly can to get people back on their feet now. And we must go further to ensure that more Angelenos do not lose their homes as a result of pandemic-related economic hardship.

Below, I outline a number of items that I urge you to consider in your deliberations. I respectfully request that they be included in the final budget.

Bold Investments in Housing Security to Prevent More Angelenos from Losing Their Homes

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted an unprecedented number of mass layoffs and sudden job losses, and there is no question that the economic fallout has prevented scores of Angelenos from being able to pay the rent. Eviction moratoriums at multiple levels of government have prevented them from falling into homelessness—for now—but these moratoriums will eventually expire, and many of the already severely rent-burdened tenants in our city will struggle to pay back rent debt on top of ongoing rent payments. If we take one lesson away from this moment, it should be a recognition of just how precarious many tenants' housing situations are.

I was heartened to see that the Mayor's proposed budget contains \$35 million in one-time funding for financial assistance, counseling, and other support services to prevent families and individuals from being evicted or becoming homeless. To prevent a looming eviction crisis that will only exacerbate our homelessness crisis, however, we must do more.



The City should draw further upon American Rescue Plan funds to launch a comprehensive housing stability program that will provide tenants' with relief for rent and utility debt, expand our rent registry and our ability to proactively inform tenants of their rights, empower the Housing and Community Investment Department (HCID) to enforce tenant protections, and codify a right to counsel for tenants facing eviction. This will cost money, but it is cheaper to keep tenants in their homes rather than trying to get them into housing once they are living on the street. To save money down the road, we need to invest in protecting tenants now.

Greater Investments in Implementing a Reimagined System for Public Safety

Last summer, the Council responded to tens of thousands of Angelenos marching for justice in the streets after the murder of George Floyd by redirecting \$150 million from the LAPD budget and beginning the process of developing a number of alternative approaches to public safety. Some of these alternatives, such as the Crisis and Incident Response through Community-Led Engagement (CIRCLE) teams and the Therapeutic Transportation Pilot, have made their way into the Mayor's proposed budget. If we are truly committed to pursuing a reimagined system of public safety through this budget, however, then we should question an allocation for LAPD that has increased 3% compared to last year.¹

I urge that we make a greater investment in these public safety alternatives than is currently planned for in this budget. Though pilot programs are a valuable method for testing new approaches, models such as the CIRCLE teams have already been proven to work in other jurisdictions. We need to be thinking about these investments not merely as one-time experiments, but as the beginning of a process of laying the groundwork and building the necessary systems for an expansive new approach to public safety for the long-term.

To unequivocally answer the call to reimagine public safety we heard last year, these programs should make up a significantly greater portion of the City's overall public safety budget.

Fully Funding the Los Angeles Justice Fund to Protect Immigrant Communities

Los Angeles is still feeling the impact of the hostile federal immigration agenda from the previous federal administration. It is imperative that we act to repair our communities and strengthen existing programs for protecting and supporting immigrant Angelenos.

During the past five years, 71% of those detained at Adelanto ICE Detention Center have been forced to go to court alone. Without legal representation, release from detention is nearly impossible. Tearing immigrants—predominantly people of color—from their homes causes untold harm that radiates through our city. Justice Fund clients have deep ties to Los Angeles, 55% having lived in our city for more than 10 years.

¹ *Garcetti's proposed city budget increases spending for LAPD by 3%*, L.A. Times, April 20, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-04-20/garcetti-proposes-slight-increase-in-lapd-spending>.



I would like to express my support and thanks to Councilmember de León for his leadership in advocating for a fully funded Justice Fund. With a \$6.42 million investment from the City over the course of two years, we will be playing our part in ensuring that legal aid groups have the multi-year funding needed to continue providing vital legal support to keep our immigrant communities whole. This will require a \$3.16 million investment in FY 2021-22 and a \$3.26 million investment in FY 2022-23, making up a third of the total cost of the program outlined in the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees' December 2020 *Proposal for a Los Angeles Immigrant Community Legal Defense Program*.² I urge you to allocate the \$3.16 million needed this budget cycle to safeguard this critical program that keeps immigrants and their loved ones together.

Restoring the Recreation and Parks Department's Operations and Maintenance Budget

The City's parks are widely cherished, but they have taken on even greater importance during the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as places of solace and refuge when Angelenos were otherwise asked to stay indoors. In the budget proposal as it currently stands, the Recreation and Parks Department will be unable to refill 140 lost positions. I am deeply concerned about the impact this will have on our parks, and I ask that you give consideration to how the budget for the Recreation and Parks Department can be restored to bring back these critical positions.

In Council District 4 alone, our understanding is that the Department's budget reduction will result in Griffith Park Observatory closures on two extra days per week and a reduction in the number of science days offered to school-aged children during the school year. And the devastating slashes to the Department's maintenance workforce—which is hardest hit with 70 positions eliminated—will put basic sanitation, upkeep, and security of our parks at risk.

Maintaining vibrant and healthy parks are a critical piece of ensuring that we build a better Los Angeles as we emerge from this crisis. Now is not a time to cut back on the resources that will enable us to preserve equitable access to outdoor space throughout our city.

Thank you for your consideration of these items. I look forward to working with you in the coming weeks to ensure that we put forward a budget that boldly meets the demands of this moment.

Sincerely,

Nithya Raman
Councilmember, 4th District

² https://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2017/17-0046-S2_misc_03-09-21.pdf