



CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

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COUNCIL HOLDS SPECIAL POLICY MEETING ON GANG VIOLENCE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Councilman Cardenas and Councilwoman Hahn, City Attorney Unveil Petition For Removal From a Gang Injunction, a City First

LOS ANGELES: On November 28, 2007, the Los Angeles City Council conducted a special topic hearing on gang violence prevention and youth development. This was one of many future special topic hearings which were scheduled as a result of the Council's Special Goal Setting Session in July 2007.

The hearing opened with Council President Eric Garcetti offering a troubling paradox: while Los Angeles is enjoying its lowest crime rate in 50 years, the City has been unable to substantially drive down youth homicide. He felt that this special hearing will have a dramatic impact on this problem, calling it "a chance to change the source of policy...an opportunity to save lives." Councilman Cardenas added that for too long, Americans have looked at the youth as a problem that had to be dealt with and affirmed that we will "not deal with youth, but work with them."

Council received a presentation from LAPD Deputy Chief Earl Paysinger, who reported that the department's initiatives to reduce gang violence through prevention and intervention have lowered gang crime 3.2% since 2006. The Council also heard testimony from City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, who declared that gang violence is the #1 public safety issue in the City of Los Angeles and that the City must find solutions via suppression, prevention, and intervention. One of the ways in which the City fights gang violence is through injunctions, which prohibit individuals from participating in a variety of gang-related activities. A problem of the injunction program was that it was nearly impossible for ex-gang members who were trying to escape the gang culture to be removed from the injunction list. Councilman Cardenas and Councilwoman Hahn, members of the Ad Hoc Gang Violence and Youth Development Committee, addressed this serious issue by requesting that the City Attorney draft a petition for ex-gang

members to use to apply for removal from the injunction. At the special hearing, City Attorney Delgadillo presented the “Petition For Removal From A Gang Injunction” and submitted it for review by the Council. This petition serves as an exit strategy which allows gang members to permanently free themselves from the bonds of the gang and start a new life as a productive member of society. Delgadillo personally thanked Councilman Cardenas and Councilwoman Hahn for their “strong, passionate voice” in working on this issue; which, in his words, represents a “big shift” from solely prosecuting gang members to providing them an exit opportunity from the gang.

The Council received several reports from departments focusing on youth development efforts, which prevent the City’s youth from joining gangs through intervention and community action. The Community Development Department reported on the success of LA Bridges, a middle school gang prevention program which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary; and Hire LA, an employment program that matched over 7,200 youth to entry-level jobs in 2006. The Department of Recreation and Parks testified that the “At The Park After Dark” and CLASS (Clean and Safe Spaces) Park programs provide incentives for youth to participate and become valuable members of the local community, thereby reducing their desire to join gangs.

Also presenting was the Human Relations Commission Juvenile Justice Task Force, a joint City/Los Angeles County program established in 2005, which seeks to prevent youth tension and violence in local San Fernando Valley middle and high schools. By meeting with student leaders directly, the Task Force was able to eliminate at least 10 specific hostile events and significantly reduce student infractions. Rev. Jeff Carr, Director of Gang Reduction and Youth Development, also provided a report which detailed the City’s gang reduction zones and the innovative step of hiring project managers from these zones as ambassadors to promote effective, on the ground action.

Council closed by requesting various reports from City departments and staff which will be further discussed in the Ad Hoc Committee for Gang Violence and Youth Development and the Public Safety Committee.

Through these special topic hearings, the City of Los Angeles City Council is developing a pioneering legislative strategy in dealing with the City’s greatest challenges by bringing together City departments and local leaders for in depth, comprehensive analysis.

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