MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Council President Nury Martinez  
Chair of the Immigrant Affairs, Civil Rights, and Equity Committee,  
Councilmember Gil Cedillo

From: embRACE Equity Alliance

Subject: Community Demands for the Development of the Office of Racial Equity

Date: October 19, 2020

During 2018 and 2019, the embRACE Equity Alliance (Alliance) — a broad coalition of Los Angeles-based organizations committed to racial equity — held over 125 community dialogues focused on building multiracial solidarity and advancing racial equity. Following the dialogues, the Alliance determined that stronger action was needed to address structural racism and that, as a first step, the City of Los Angeles (City) should establish an Office of Racial Equity (ORE).

The City Council responded in December 2019 by passing a unanimous motion to explore creating an ORE. In doing so, the Council declared that “racial inequities that exist in Los Angeles are not accidental – they are the result of various historic, systemic, and socioeconomic factors, including biased and discriminatory government decisions, policies, and practices.”

Amid this backdrop – and recent protests against anti-Black police violence and a City budget that perpetuates such violence — Mayor Eric Garcetti announced that the City would create an ORE by July 1, 2020. He also announced that the ORE would be placed within the newly established Department of Civil and Human Rights (DCHR). While the Alliance of organizations are enthused around this bold step to move forward with the ORE, as critical
partners, we were not engaged on the front end, nor have specifics been provided to ensure that the ORE is more than a symbolic gesture.

Since then, we have had the opportunity to engage with Capri Maddox, Executive Director for the Department of Civil and Human Rights, and Council President Nury Martinez to learn more about the current process to establish the ORE. In both conversations, the city officials were very candid about what has been planned, including some of the challenges to move the ORE forward as they envision. We are deeply grateful to both Ms. Maddox’s and Council President Martinez’s commitment to support the ORE and to engage with the Alliance to help shape it.

We are also committed to partner with the City to establish an Office of Racial Equity that proactively addresses systemic racism. As community-based organizations working directly with low-income communities of color and civil rights advocates, we hold valuable expertise to support the City’s efforts to end institutional racism and systemic barriers within city government. Only through authentic engagement with communities of color most harmed by systemic racism will the City implement the policy solutions and practices needed to truly transform living conditions and provide equitable opportunities for residents. In the spirit of building authentic partnerships, we also find it necessary to raise several concerns about the current process to develop the ORE and current level of community engagement.

First, although fruitful conversations have been held overall with city officials up until this point, information has been limited. Our Alliance has not been genuinely consulted when it comes to decisions and action regarding the ORE’s trajectory. Rather, we are informed at the last minute or after the fact, hampering our ability to engage, mobilize, and inform the City’s actions effectively. Second, to our knowledge, no report has been completed by the CLA and CAO, as mandated in the December 2019 motion. Moreover, the same motion calls for our Alliance’s involvement by the CLA/CAO to inform the report; however, no engagement has happened. In the absence of the report and sustained engagement with us, we are left to speculate about what information is guiding the ORE’s development. We are also left to speculate about how voices of residents we have engaged, residents most impacted by racial disparities, are helping to define the foundation and guiding framework for the ORE.

Therefore, we respectfully demand that the Mayor and City Council authentically consult and collaborate with the Alliance on creating an ORE and that any plan for the ORE include the following minimum requirements to truly bring about long-term and racially equitable systemic change:

1. **Core Functions:**
   a. Policy Research and Analysis on the racial equity impacts of existing and proposed City policies and practices.
   b. Data Collection and Publicly Available Analysis of key racial equity indicators.
c. **Civic Engagement** program that focuses on improving and increasing political participation by communities historically marginalized and excluded from government decision-making, especially low-income communities of color.
d. **Technical Assistance and Training** for City staff on racial equity concepts, policies, and practices.
e. **Community Advisory Committee** that informs and advises the ORE and holds it accountable to communities most impacted by racial inequities.

2. **Funding:**
   a. $25 million annually for the ORE to implement the above Core Functions. This includes sufficient staffing for the size and diversity of Los Angeles’ population and resources to partner with and facilitate the participation of community-based organizations and residents.
   b. $100 million ($10 million for ten years) for a Community Justice Fund that is managed by the ORE to fund community-based organizations to create space and community for intergenerational community connection that challenges anti-Black racism, Indigenous erasure, and other forms of institutional discrimination, and promotes the affirmation of Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

3. **Placement:**
   a. Establish the ORE within the Department of Civil and Human Rights (DCHR) with the necessary staffing, funding, and delegated powers to effectively carry out its mission and functions.
   b. In order to ensure that the ORE is at equal standing of priority with the civil and human rights branch of the DCHR, change the department’s name to the Department of Racial Equity and Civil and Human Rights, to include race and equity, but not to the exclusion of civil and human rights, so that the Department adequately reflects the focus on both.

4. **Personnel**
   a. Given the distinct purpose and functions of the ORE and the civil and human rights branches in the DCHR, as well as the scale and capacity necessary for each to be fully executed, co-executive directors should be set in place for the department, each focused on one of the programmatic branches, and working together to run the department as a whole.
   b. In hiring the ORE’s executive director, include as requirements that the individual have: 1) a passion for advancing racial equity and social justice solutions; 2) expertise in community building and engagement with diverse racial and ethnic communities; 3) a deep understanding of systemic and institutional racism and bias; and 4) experience and a working understanding of the effective methods of organizational and institutional change.
Your leadership to advance racial equity and civil and human rights that centers the community’s vision and recommendations will forever be locked in our history as the pivotal moment when our city government laid the foundation to transform the culture, policies, and practices for a more equitable and just City of Los Angeles. We look forward to meeting with you in the coming weeks to further discuss our requests and work together to fully integrate them in the ORE’s development and planning. Please contact Mariana Villafaña with Community Coalition (CoCo) at m.villafana@cocosouthla.org to coordinate and set a meeting.

Sincerely,

A New Way of Life
Advancement Project California
Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council
Boys and Girls Club LA Harbor
Brotherhood Crusade
CADRE
California Native Vote Project
Central American Resource Center
Champions in Service
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights
Coalition for Responsible Community Development
Community Coalition
Homeboy Industries
InnerCity Struggle

Koreatown Immigrant Worker Alliance
LA CAN
LA Conservation Corps
LA VOICE
Labor Community Strategy Center
National Council of Jewish Women LA
Pacoima Beautiful
Revolve Impact
Southern California Grantmakers - TRHT Initiative
The River Project
TransLatin@ Coalition
United American Indian Involvement
Venice Community Housing Corporation

CC:
City Councilmember Paul Krekorian, Chair of the Budget and Finance Committee
City Councilmember Paul Koretz, Chair of the Personnel & Animal Welfare Committee
City Councilmember Monica Rodriguez
City Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson
City Councilmember Curren Price
City Councilmember Herb Wesson
City Councilmember Bob Blumenfield
City Councilmember David Ryu
City Councilmember Mike Bonin
City Councilmember John Lee
City Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell
City Councilmember Kevin de Leon
City Councilmember Joe Buscaino