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Education Unions, Schoolteacher Organizations Team Up with Child Safety Advocates to Tell Garcetti to Hire More Crossing Guards

Broad Support for Fix LA Proposal Signals Growing Demand for “No-Brainer” Spending and Cites Banks, Not Labor as City Budget Buster

Los Angeles – Advocates for the developmentally disabled, education reform activists, parent and women’s organizations, school employee and teachers’ unions that don’t always agree on school policy are singing the same tune on student safety: Seven influential groups wrote Mayor Eric Garcetti and LA City Council President Herb Wesson this week to urge approval of a labor contract proposal that would significantly increase the number of crossing guards employed by the City of Los Angeles, following a 37% decline in positions since 2008.

In a joint [letter](#) sent one year after a [mother was fatally struck](#) by a truck as she walked her fourth-grader across an unguarded Hollywood intersection, the principals of UTLA, Leadership for Educational Equity-Los Angeles, SEIU Local 99, United Way of Greater LA, Special Needs Network, Inc., National Organization for Women-CA, and Educators 4 Excellence endorsed the Fix LA proposal to hire and assign crossing guards at every elementary and middle school.

Arguing that the City of Los Angeles enjoys a healthy surplus but has left children vulnerable, the unlikely alliance further warned against the underfunding and policy corner-cutting that has allowed one-third of elementary school intersections to go unguarded this school year and a shoestring \$6.4 million budget that puts the number of crossing guards at a 10-year low:

“Teetering around the edges with parent volunteer committees or contracting out services is far more costly and unreliable than the real solution on the table proposed by Fix LA,” the letter read, noting that just \$3 million in annual additional funding could restore staffing to pre-recession levels (576 positions) but that greater investment was necessary to patrol dangerous middle schools as well as elementary intersections across the LAUSD and charter systems.

[Fix LA](#) is the “labor-neighbor” alliance led by several faith-based, worker and civic associations including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Alliance of Californians for Community

Empowerment, CARECEN, SEIU Local 721, AFSCME and other members of the LA City Coalition of Unions – the latter of which has invited residents and community leaders to the traditional bargaining table with city management to negotiate job and service restorations that were cut since Wall Street crashed the economy in 2008.

“We come together as current and former educators, crossing guards, parents, school and city employees with a firm belief that all children need access to a quality education,” said Salina Joiner, a member of LEE Los Angeles, an educational advocacy and leadership development group consisting of current and former teachers. “A critical piece of that equation is making sure we are reinvesting in these vital services so kids of all ages from every zip code are able to access that education safely.” Joiner is also president of Asociación de Maestros Unidos, a California Teachers Association affiliate.

In what many observers say could have been prevented had [LAUSD’s repeated requests](#) for a crossing guard been granted, the unthinkable happened: Marleni Barrera, 42, was killed and her nine-year-old daughter sustained injuries as the two crossed the street one morning in February 2014. The incident was among the most tragic and publicized in recent years, but it hardly is an isolated case: Schoolchildren ages five to 17 account for nearly one-fifth of all pedestrian fatalities and severe injuries in LA.

Fix LA released a [white paper](#) last August detailing the [shortage of crossing guards](#) and low wages that characterize a workforce fueled by women of color who have children and grandchildren enrolled in LAUSD schools. But City Hall budget watchers first took note of Fix LA’s groundbreaking research earlier that year; [No Small Fees](#) uncovered big banks are bleeding vital services dry by charging LA nearly \$300 million in annual transaction fees alone.

More recently, [environmentalists seized upon the group’s evidence](#) that New York Mellon Bank, using an interest-rate scheme the financial services industry calls “swaps,” has already siphoned \$65 million from a special fund devoted to wastewater services and sewage treatment, creating public health and pollution risks that further threaten LA’s beaches and coastline. City workers and Fix LA have vowed to step up public pressure; no Administration official has renegotiated the terms of the ongoing deal, despite a [unanimous vote in Council](#) mandating the CAO do so.

In the meantime, Joiner and other leaders and members from the seven organizations that signed the letter to Mayor Garcetti in support of Fix LA’s approach have committed to joint grassroots lobbying with LAUSD board members and the LA City Council budget & finance committee to advance their “common interest in the immediate and obvious benefits to our schools and communities, working families, public safety and the crossing guard workforce.”

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