### FIX LA FACT SHEET: Student and Public Safety in Jeopardy

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# One-Third of Elementary School Intersections Go Unguarded As School Year Starts

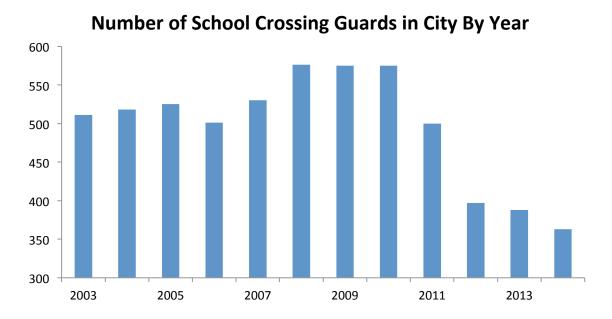
## Number of School Crossing Guards to Protect Kids in LA City Hits 10-Year Low

The City of Los Angeles is responsible for supplying crossing guards to public and private elementary schools within the City.

However, the facts below demonstrate the City is falling short in fulfilling this responsibility and fail to account for middle-school safety, placing the lives of children and their parents at risk for injury and death.

### LA CITY CROSSING GUARD STAFFING LEVELS AT 10-YEAR LOW

The City's complement of crossing guards, who typically earn just over \$13,500 a year at \$15.86 per hour, has **fallen from a high of 576 in 2008 to a low of 363 this year**, as reflected in the chart below. That is a <u>37% decline</u>. The overwhelming majority of crossing guards are African-American and Latina women.



Sources: LA City budget documents showing "actual" staffing levels from 2003 through 2007 and "adopted" staffing levels from 2008 through 2012. LA City Controller payroll records for 2013 and 2014.

#### THE NEED FOR CROSSING GUARDS IS CLEAR

Yet, the need for crossing guards is clear: School age children, from five to 17, account for 18% of all pedestrian fatalities and severe injuries in the City.<sup>1</sup>

Fix LA and the Coalition of LA City Unions recommend that the City staff busy intersections at middle schools as well as elementary schools to help ensure the safety of our children. The alliance is jointly advocating the proposal in community and City forums as well as collective bargaining negotiations.

The problem of lack of staffing received public attention in February of this year when Marleni Barrera, 42, was struck by a truck and killed as she walked her fourth-grade daughter to a charter school on the campus of Joseph Le Conte Middle School in Hollywood. The Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) said the school district had asked for a guard at that intersection and that the intersection was busy enough to qualify. But the LADOT said it had been unable to supply a guard because of "limited resources."

As of March 2014, the department said its own traffic studies **showed 507 intersections near 307 elementary schools qualified for crossing guards**. But the City was unable to staff 169 of those intersections.<sup>3</sup> In other words, one-third of the corners where LADOT had determined through traffic surveys that a school crossing guard was needed remained unstaffed.

Days after the Hollywood tragedy, LADOT had told the City Council that the situation was a little bit better than its March results showed, with "approximately 140" busy intersections near elementary schools unstaffed: "Unfortunately, the Department has not been able to hire since 2009 due to the economic crisis and the prioritization of services provided to residents as directed by City administrators. Due to the mature age of the Crossing Guard staff, the program staffing level continues to decline. The attrition rate for crossing guards is approx. 1.1 per month."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See page 2 of LA DOT report at <a href="http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2014/14-0348\_rpt\_dot\_03-20-14.pdf">http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2014/14-0348\_rpt\_dot\_03-20-14.pdf</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-hollywood-crossing-guard-20140213-story.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Aug. 6, 2014 e-mail communication from LA DOT's Senior Traffic Supervisor La Tonya Allen .

<sup>4</sup> http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2014/14-0033 rpt dot 02-10-14.pdf

The City makes no attempt to supply crossing guards to middle schools and crossing guards are barred from helping middle school students cross a street. "According to the Department of Transportation, crossing guards cannot help a child who is not an elementary school student, even if they request assistance crossing the street," City Councilmember Tom LaBonge told his colleagues in a 2008 motion asking that the situation be studied. "There have been incidences of middle school students asking for help, but being denied assistance by a crossing guard," LaBonge wrote.<sup>5</sup>

LA Unified School Board Member Tamar Galatzan wrote LaBonge at the time to say she agreed that not helping middle-school children was an "unwise policy." "You are no doubt aware," she wrote, "that not long ago a student at King Middle School was struck by a moving vehicle and seriously injured. Given the regulations against putting crossing guards at middle schools, it is only a matter of time before another incident or incidents of this type takes place.<sup>6</sup>

LaBonge's motion died.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after the Hollywood tragedy, LA County's Board of Supervisors directed the County's Department of Public Works to place crossing guards at intersections near middle schools where traffic is heavy.<sup>8</sup>

#### FUNDING CROSSING GUARDS SHOULD BE A PUBLIC SAFETY PRIORITY

The typical Los Angeles City crossing guard is a woman of color and earns \$13,565 per year. At that rate, \$1 million pays for about 74 crossing guards. For \$3 million, the City could get back to its peak crossing guard staffing levels from 2008. However, that is not in the City's plans.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2007/07-2508-s1 mot 9-17-08.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2007/07-2508-S1 MISC 10-22-2008.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2007/07-2508-S1 ca 7-1-11.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> <a href="http://www.dailynews.com/government-and-politics/20140305/la-county-supervisors-approve-deploying-crossing-guards-at-certain-middle-schools">http://www.dailynews.com/government-and-politics/20140305/la-county-supervisors-approve-deploying-crossing-guards-at-certain-middle-schools</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> That was the median in 2013 according to City Controller payroll data.

In 2013, the City Council instructed LADOT to report to the Mayor and Council "with detailed options" to reduce costs of crossing guards through expanded use of parent volunteers, obtaining reimbursements from private schools, contracting out crossing guard services and renegotiating bonuses with the bargaining unit." <sup>10</sup>

Most crossing guards work about four hours a day in split shifts. About 20 years ago, The City was having difficulty finding people willing to work in the mornings when schools began, take a long unpaid break, then return to work in the afternoons when schools let out.<sup>11</sup>

To solve the recruitment and retention problem that many school districts face, the City created an incentive of one hour's pay to overcome the time obstacles. A second one-hour incentive was added in 2004 when LA Unified switched from half-day to full-day kindergarten and crossing guards were not needed in the middle of the day. The program worked – students are protected in mornings and afternoons; and crossing guards felt compensated for their dual time commitments.

The split-shift incentive was up for renewal, but instead of extending it, City officials chose to allow it to expire – thereby rescinding this important retention program. The entire crossing guard program cost the City \$5.6 million in wages in 2013, including incentives, according to City Controller payroll data. Crossing guards received no health benefits, the data showed.

This year, the City Council instructed LADOT to "report to the Transportation Committee regarding the resources needed to expand the Crossing Guard program to all City elementary schools." <sup>12</sup>

 $<sup>^{10}</sup>$  The request for the full report is available at  $\underline{\text{http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2013/13-0600-S139\_misc\_05-23-13.pdf}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> April 30, 2011, "Crossing guards boost pay by 50 percent with bonuses," LA Daily News, available at http://www.dailynews.com/20110501/crossing-guards-boost-pay-by-50-percent-with-bonuses

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The full report has been requested in a document available at <a href="http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2014/14-0600-S212\_MISC\_05-21-14.pdf">http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2014/14-0600-S212\_MISC\_05-21-14.pdf</a>

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PUTTING CHILDRENS' NEEDS...AND SAFETY... BEFORE WALL STREET GREED

As reported in the release of Fix LA's "No Small Fees" report in March, each year the City of

Los Angeles pays Wall Street banks nearly \$300 million in fees. The City spends an additional

\$200 million annually in maintaining bank-owned foreclosed homes that have fallen into

disrepair. At the same time, hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts have been made to the critical

City services that Los Angeles neighborhoods, families and children, rely on. It's time for City

leaders to hold Wall Street banks accountable and put childrens' needs before Wall Street greed.

Fix LA will continue to urge the City to reward and value crossing guards and ensure students at

every middle and elementary school are protected at dangerous intersections.

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