

## Communication from Public

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**Council File No:** 25-0030-S1

**Comments for Public Posting:** Please find attached a written comment from the Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative urging the Ad Hoc Committee for LA Recovery to adopt a motion to prevent trafficking in the wake of natural disasters. The motion calls for public awareness, training, and concrete measures to ensure that contractors engaged in City-funded recovery efforts are not involved in trafficking. Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue. We appreciate your leadership and your commitment to a just and equitable recovery for all Angelenos.



April 21, 2025

**Ad Hoc Committee for LA Recovery**

Los Angeles City Council  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Reference: City Motion to Prevent Human Trafficking in the Wake of Natural Disasters**

Dear Honorable Members of the Ad Hoc Committee for LA Recovery,

On behalf of the Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative, I write in strong support of the motion to prevent human trafficking in the wake of natural disasters and to urge its immediate adoption by this Committee and the full Council.

Los Angeles has faced multiple climate-driven disasters in recent years, from wildfires and floods to extreme heat. Each one has deepened existing inequities and left many Angelenos, especially those who are undocumented, low-income, or unhoused, at greater risk of exploitation. This is a known consequence of disaster recovery efforts when protections are not in place. A 2021 *New Yorker* article, *The Migrant Workers Who Follow Climate Disasters*,<sup>1</sup> illustrates how disasters across the country have led to a growing market for cheap, unprotected labor. In these environments, informal networks and unvetted contractors often pull in workers, many of them undocumented or displaced, into clean-up and recovery jobs that lack basic protections. These workers face wage theft, hazardous conditions, and sometimes coercion and abuse. We encourage members of this Committee and the City Council to read the article, which offers powerful context for the risks we face here in Los Angeles.

We are already seeing these patterns unfold locally. Earlier this year, after the devastating fires in the Pacific Palisades, Melissa, a day laborer, was picked up from a street corner and taken to clean a home damaged by the fires. She received no training or protective equipment, was exposed to toxic materials, and was never paid. Many of her fellow workers, too afraid to come forward due to immigration status or threats, endured similar abuse. Melissa has since filed a complaint with Cal/OSHA, but most victims remain in the shadows.

Los Angeles County has already taken action. The Board of Supervisors recently passed a motion, led by Supervisor Holly Mitchell, to address the risk of human trafficking in disaster recovery. It includes essential provisions such as public awareness campaigns, training for city personnel and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/11/08/the-migrant-workers-who-follow-climate-disasters>





contractors, and concrete measures to ensure that County contractors are not complicit in labor trafficking. We urge the City to do the same.

We strongly support the motion's focus on public awareness, training, and concrete measures to ensure contractors engaged in City-funded recovery efforts are not involved in trafficking. This is an opportunity for the City of Los Angeles to align with the County and demonstrate a united, proactive stance.

Addressing trafficking isn't just about enforcement, it's about reducing risks before harm happens. These measures can help prevent the exploitation we're seeing today and protect workers in the climate-related disasters we know are coming. That's why taking a proactive approach is not only wise but necessary. We respectfully urge this Committee and the City Council to pass the motion and commit to a just, safe, and equitable recovery for all Angelenos.

Sincerely,

*Paloma Bustos*

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Paloma Bustos, MSW

Policy Associate

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