

December 7, 2020

The Honorable City Councilmembers  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: Supporting Establishment of a City of Los Angeles Youth Development Department**

Dear Councilmembers:

I am the Executive Director of El Nido Family Centers (El Nido), a youth and family services nonprofit operating in Los Angeles. As a member of the Invest in Youth Coalition, my organization is joining the call to establish a Youth Development Department in the City, to create a brighter future for the next generation of Angelenos.

Last year, El Nido served 3,000 youth and transition-age youth (TAY) in low-income communities of color across the City—from Northeast San Fernando Valley to South Los Angeles—through multiple programs, including:

- FamilySource Centers in Pacoima and South West Los Angeles, with tutoring, college preparation and other educational and workforce development activities for youth and TAY.
- The Pacoima Gang Reduction & Youth Development program for young people at risk of gang joining, offering coaching, positive group activities and more.
- Teen Parent Families Services program, providing case management, supportive services and linkages to help adolescent parents graduate from high school and plan for their educational and professional futures.

In my three decades of tenure at El Nido, I have personally witnessed the positive impact of programs that provide young people from under-resourced communities the knowledge and skills they need to become effective leaders; these services uplift entire communities. Nonetheless, Los Angeles youth still face serious challenges. Poverty, disconnection from educational and workforce institutions, housing instability and justice system involvement are far too common. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated issues among the youth and TAY El Nido serves, threatening the possibility of an equitable recovery.

For these reasons, a strategic, citywide approach from a Youth Development Department is essential, allowing an ongoing role for nonprofit advocates to deliver solutions alongside City of Los Angeles programs. A stand-alone department focused on prevention will allow for a restorative and comprehensive way of supporting youth and is an effective public safety strategy. The City's Youth Development Taskforce is already working on a blueprint to create a unified department, and I encourage policymakers to complement its efforts by making a down payment. Once the initial investment is made, more resources could be devoted to expand the agency.

Los Angeles stands at a crossroads. Confronting unprecedented challenges, the City

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has a unique opportunity to establish a Youth Development Department as the first step toward a more prosperous, safe and equitable future. I urge you to act now to take the following important steps and actions:

### **1. Establish a Youth Development Department**

Take the steps necessary to establish a Youth Development Department by creating the initial infrastructure and staffing for the agency. The department will be instrumental in implementing the recommendations of the Executive Task Force on Youth Development that was established by the City Council to develop the framework for a department along with a citywide youth development strategy.

### **2. Research Opportunities Through Justice Reinvestment**

Reprogramming resources from policing into a youth agency would begin the first steps in pursuing a racially just approach to youth development. It is well known that justice-system costs run high – so establishing a stand-alone department focused on prevention would allow a more humane and restorative method of supporting youth. Two benefits would likely result. First, the City's long-term financial outlook could improve as more General Fund resources would be made available from the decreases in police spending. Second, young people would have access to the positive youth development programming they need and deserve.

The work to ensure that Los Angeles is a place where all young people can thrive begins now. The processes presented through Justice Reinvestment can support and accomplish this vision. I therefore join the calls from the Invest in Youth Coalition for the City to establish a Youth Development Department, and I look forward to working in partnership on this vital issue.

Sincerely,



Liz Herrera, L.C.S.W.  
Executive Director

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