



October 27, 2020

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

**Re: Establishing a Youth Development Department in the City of Los Angeles**

Dear Councilmembers:

The Invest in Youth Coalition, comprised of nonprofit organizations, community leaders, educators, parents, and young people interested in their peers' wellbeing, has focused its last seven years of advocacy on efforts to establish a Youth Development Department. Our theory of change emphasizes the importance of strategic youth development and the value of providing young people, especially young people of color living in the most under-resourced communities, the knowledge and skills they need to become effective leaders. We encourage the immediate application of equitable funding that establishes a citywide agency to support the next generation of Angelenos' through the challenges of today and in future years.

Currently, Los Angeles is one of the few large cities in the United States without a dedicated youth department. As a result, youth outcomes trend negative: 200,000 live in poverty<sup>1</sup>, nearly 70,000 are disconnected from educational and workforce pipelines<sup>2</sup>, 8,000 are homeless<sup>3</sup> and tens of thousands<sup>4</sup> are impacted by the justice system. As policymakers continue to sort through the wreckage caused by COVID-19, these figures have not stayed immune: Between mid-March and late-April, 53 percent of statewide unemployment claims were made by young people ages 16 to 24.<sup>5</sup> At this point, only one thing is certain: the need for a department has been dramatically accelerated given the level of uncertainty youth and their families face in the pandemic.

The magnitude of complications facing the city demand that we do more. There should be an ongoing role for nonprofit advocates to deliver those solutions alongside city programs. By investing the necessary resources into a youth agency will begin the first steps in pursuing a systemic approach to youth development. 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 we 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Ages 10 to 24. Source: American Community Survey, 2015, 5-year

<sup>2</sup> Fogg, N., & Harrington, P. (2016) Understanding the Diminished Prospects of Disconnected Youth in Los Angeles. Drexel Center for Labor Markets and Policy.

<sup>3</sup> 2020 Homeless County. Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.lacity.org/A-Safe-City/Arrest-Data-from-2020-to-Present/amvf-fr72>  
(Updated 9/30/20; Downloaded 10/19/20; Filter: ages 25 and under)

<sup>5</sup> <https://hildalsolis.org/la-county-to-identify-funding-to-continue-offering-young-people-work-experience-through-youthwork/>

Los Angeles stands at a crossroads. The city is confronting unprecedented challenges, and has a unique opportunity to establish a Youth Development Department as the first step toward a more prosperous, safe and equitable future. We urge you to act **now** to take the following important steps and actions:

**1. Establish a Youth Development Department**

Take the steps necessary now to establish a Youth Development Department by creating the initial infrastructure and staffing for the department. 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 Proposition 15.**

The city's budget remains in flux due to the uncertainties of COVID-19. How we respond to this will inform and shape the lives of young people in every community. Proposition 15 could result in hundreds of millions of dollars in new revenue – a portion (minimum 20%) must be used to sustain a youth strategy.

**3. 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 for a more humane and restorative way of supporting youth. This creates two benefits. First, the city's long-term financial outlook could benefit 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 deserve.

The work to ensure that Los Angeles is a place where all young people can thrive begins now. The processes presented through Proposition 15 and Justice Reinvestment can support and accomplish the vision. We call upon the city to establish a Youth Development Department and look forward to working in partnership on this important issue.

Respectfully,

**The Invest In Youth Coalition**

*\*Signed by individual supporting organizations and youth below:*

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