INJUNCTIONS = INJUSTICE

July 22, 2013

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We are youth, families, grassroots leaders, and organizations that live, work and/or attend school in the City of Los Angeles, including many residents of Echo Park and the neighboring communities that are included in the proposed “safety zone.”

We are writing for two reasons: (1) To urge you to halt the city’s proposed gang injunction in the Echo Park area, and (2) To request that you meet with the community to hear directly resident solutions for public safety. We are also seeking a moratorium on gang injunctions until their impacts and costs can be studied, but we will address that in a separate letter.

We have many concerns:

1. Echo Park and the surrounding communities targeted by this injunction did not ask for this action, and they do not perceive the groups identified in the city’s filing as a nuisance. They have, however, indentified other public nuisances that the city should deal with, such as public urination, public drunkenness, and vomiting on their residences. All of these are a result of the gentrification of the area, as they occur outside the bars and clubs that cater to the young, predominantly white population that recently moved to the neighborhood.

2. Crime in the police divisions that patrol Echo Park and the surrounding community is at a 30 year low, and there is no evidence for the need for an injunction at this time.

3. The proposed gang injunction does correspond with increased gentrification and redevelopment of both Echo Park and the surrounding community.

In the past twenty years, Echo Park has undergone significant racial change as young, predominantly white and more affluent people have displaced large numbers of working-class Latino families from the area (see chart below). Echo Park’s white population has
increase by as much as 17% since 1990. In comparison, Los Angeles County’s white non-Latino population has dropped from 40.83% in 1990 to 27.79% in 2010. And, not surprisingly, along with the increase in the white population has come hundreds of millions of dollars in redevelopment including a multi-million dollar refurbishing of Echo Park (the park for which the community is known).

Echo Park Census Tracts in 90026 Zip Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Tract</th>
<th>% White (Non-Latino) 1990</th>
<th>% White (Non-Latino) 2007-2011</th>
<th>% Change in White Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CT # 1955</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>+17.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>CT # 1956</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>+9.1</td>
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<td>CT # 1975</td>
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<td>22.4</td>
<td>+10.3</td>
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<td>CT # 1973</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>+11.3</td>
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1990 Census of Population and Housing, Public Law 94-171 Data (official), Age by Race and Hispanic Origin, Los Angeles County California; ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, Los Angeles County, California

Historically, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that real estate – not public safety – is the most significant factor in determining the location of gang injunctions. We have included some of that history at the bottom of this letter.

4. The label of “gang member” is often applied with little to no court oversight, based solely on the observations of law enforcement.

5. People are often added to the local or the statewide CalGang database with no right to notification, appeal or fair and transparent removal process, and those databases are often used to build a case for who should be placed on an injunction. The gang label sticks for a lifetime, which makes it difficult to pass background checks for jobs, public housing, and other opportunities, and increases the discrimination and challenges that a person faces.

6. Gang injunctions do not address the root causes or long-term effects of street violence.

7. Gang injunctions keep people from accessing the resources – jobs, housing, and schools – that will better their lives, reduce recidivism, and decrease gang involvement. In fact, injunctions further marginalize people and often push those who are involved in the streets even further into the underground economy to survive.

8. Gang injunctions tear families, friends, and communities apart. They ruin social networks that are financially and emotionally important. If someone lives with, hangs out with, talks to, or is in the same area with another person who is on an injunction, they are likely to be added to the injunction by association. If two or more people on an injunction are outside together, they can be arrested and jailed for violating the association order of the injunction – even if those people are family members who live in the same home.

9. A mapping of police violence reveals that law enforcement’s shooting and killing of civilians – the majority of who are unarmed – is higher in injunction areas than in neighboring communities with the same racial demographics and levels of crime.

10. There have been no studies indicating that a neighborhood changed for the better after a gang injunction was implemented. And there is evidence that injunctions displace drug trafficking and other crime from the injunction “safety zone” to areas outside the safety zone – expanding crime and violence.

11. There has been no public accounting or evaluation of the cost effectiveness of gang injunctions, despite the estimate that tens of millions of dollars have been spent on their creation, implementation, enforcement and prosecution. In summary, for thirty years, gang injunctions have been expanding throughout Los Angeles County without community involvement or oversight. Los Angeles City now has more than 40 injunctions impacting more than 70 neighborhoods. The cost of gang injunctions’ implementation, enforcement, and prosecution has never been fully audited or evaluated, and the impact on gentrification and displacement has never been mapped.

We can be contacted through the Youth Justice Coalition @ Chuco’s Justice Center: 1137 E. Redondo Blvd., on the border between South Central L.A. and Inglewood, 90302 PO Box 73688, L.A., CA 90003. 323-327-1259 / e-mail: freelanow@yahoo.com
As described above, the history of gang injunctions also reveals that injunctions have been used as very effective tools for gentrification and the displacement of entire communities of poor and working class people – particularly people of color.

For over 30 years, since they were first implemented by law enforcement on the eastern edge of L.A. County in the communities of Pomona and West Covina (that were at the time majority white communities that included extreme contrasts of poverty and wealth), gang injunctions have been used not when communities were suffering the highest levels of violence, but when communities were either being gentrified, experiencing increasing property values, and/or were bordered by majority white and wealthier communities.

The development of entertainment centers, business districts, and luxury housing have often corresponded to the use of gang injunctions. Urban renewal, redevelopment, revitalization, rejuvenation, and rehabilitation are often used to push poor and working class people – overwhelmingly people of color – out.

The first L.A. City gang injunction, implemented in 1987, targeted the Playboy Gangster Crips – residents of the small West L.A. neighborhood next to white and wealthy Culver City and Beverly Hills – while South Central and East L.A. were both experiencing the nation’s highest homicide rates. Northwest Pasadena implemented injunctions against Denver Lanes (Bloods) and Villa Boys when that community began to experience gentrification by white professionals into long-time communities of color. When the Staples Center was built (the new home for the L.A. Lakers, Clippers and Kings) along with the new L.A. Convention Center, the 18th Street injunction was suddenly put in place in the Pico Union community despite decades of much higher rates of violence and crime that preceded it. When public housing was dismantled in Wilmington through federal so-called Hope VI’s redevelopment program, Wilmington also got its first gang injunction. When the University of Southern California began to rapidly expand student and staff housing around their campus in the mid 2000s, (as part of their 100 year redevelopment, expansion and gentrification plan for South Central L.A.), the Exposition Metro line was built and the Rollin’ 40’s Crips got their gang injunction – at a time when the community was also experiencing significant declines in violence and despite the fact that the Rollin’ 40s neighborhoods suffered extremely high rates of homicide and other violence in the 1980s and 90s.

For all these reasons, we are calling on you to:

1. Halt the city’s proposed gang injunction in Echo Park; and
2. Meet with us to hear directly community solutions for public safety.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Individuals who live, work or attend school in the communities targeted by the proposed injunction:

Other Los Angeles residents:

Schools, businesses, community and faith-based organizations:

To sign on to this letter, either sign the endorsement form directly below or e-mail us at freelanow@yahoo.com with your name and/or name of your affiliation and indicate which of the categories you want to be included under. Please e-mail, post and circulate by hand to everyone you know. Fax completed endorsement forms to the Youth Justice Coalition at 323-846-9472; or e-mail us the names and affiliations to freelanow@yahoo.com.
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- [ ] I go to school in the area targeted by the proposed injunction.
- [ ] I work in the area targeted by the proposed injunction.
- [ ] List me as an individual.
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