



# UNITED FIREFIGHTERS of LOS ANGELES CITY

Local 112 IAFF AFL-CIO-CLC

September 10, 2025

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

Honorable City Council Members:

On behalf of the nearly 3,400 members of United Firefighters of Los Angeles City (UFLAC), we write in strong opposition to any proposal that would allow multi-family residential buildings of up to six stories to be constructed with a single exit stairway.

This is a critical matter for public and firefighter safety. In a residential fire, stairways are lifelines for residents evacuating and for firefighters advancing hose lines and conducting rescues. Reducing egress to a single stairway creates a single point of failure. When that stairway fills with heat, smoke, flames, or is obstructed by evacuees or debris, safe egress and timely interior attack can be lost immediately.

Our city's history is filled with painful lessons about the role unprotected or inadequately controlled stairways can play in turning routine fires into mass-casualty incidents, including:

- The Ponet Square Hotel fire on September 13, 1970, when 19 residents died after fire and smoke raced up open, unprotected stairs and corridors. These conditions were so deadly that the City enacted the "Ponet Doors" ordinance to require enclosed stairways and rated doors in older multi-story residential buildings.
- The Stratford Apartments fire on November 15, 1973, when 25 people were killed and 51 injured after a lobby fire raced up open stairways and mushroomed at the upper floors. This tragic incident once again highlighted how unprotected stairways and corridor openings can become heat and smoke chimneys and essentially result in death traps for occupants.

- The Dorothy Mae Apartment Hotel fire on September 4, 1982, when 25 lives were lost after flames and smoke moved through corridors and stairways when doors were opened. This fire led to the “Dorothy Mae” ordinance which mandated additional sprinklers and door controls in residential buildings.
- The 330 S. Burlington Avenue fire on May 3, 1993, when 10 residents (including 7 children) were killed in a Westlake apartment arson. Officials reported a stairway and roof door left open created a chimney effect, drawing smoke and fire upward through the building. This case is yet another reminder that when stairways are compromised, consequences are immediate and lethal.

While these tragic events differ in specifics, the common operational truth was and remains the same - once fire or toxic smoke takes the stairways, both civilian egress and firefighter ingress are jeopardized. That’s why Los Angeles has, for decades, required protected, redundant egress in multi-family buildings. It’s also why the Los Angeles City Council has historically tightened, not loosened, stairway and safety requirements after tragedies. Supporting an ordinance to allow for single exit, single stairway buildings of up to six stories is a big step in the wrong direction that will inevitably have tragic results for public and firefighter safety.

While it may sound good in theory to say that single stairway exits can be made safe with additional building requirements, that’s not the reality on the ground here in Los Angeles. The truth is that buildings age, systems are deferred, doors are propped, stairways get cluttered or even broken, maintenance lapses, and human behavior is imperfect, especially under stress. Our members routinely encounter disabled fire doors, compromised ventilation, and stairwells choked with storage. In the real world that our members operate in every single day, redundancy is not a luxury. It can and will mean the difference between life and death.

We heard the recent remarks in PLUM Committee on September 9, 2025, from our LAFD Fire Marshal regarding the safety of this proposal and, to be blunt, he’s either flat out wrong or merely afraid to tell the truth. There’s a reason why the International Association of Fire Fighters, California Professional Firefighters, and every fire union in California that we are aware of oppose single stairway exits. They are simply not safe.

It’s important to note that as of today, there is not a single city in the State of California that has passed a single stairway ordinance. The discussion in Los Angeles has included numerous references to the City of Seattle, which does allow single stairways in their building code. However, it’s critical to know that Karen Grove, Seattle’s Executive Director of Fire Prevention who reports to the city’s fire marshal, said this about single stairways as the State of Washington was considering adopting a similar statewide policy:

***“The city building department, the fire marshal, and myself are all against the single exit stair as the code for everyone because we feel that most jurisdictions are not situated like we are in Seattle. We were comfortable with this in Seattle because we have a hydrant on every corner. We have a well-funded municipal career fire department with outstanding response times. We have a good complement of aerial ladders distributed throughout the city that we could put quickly on scene if we need to affect a rescue.” (Single Stair, Many Questions. NFPA Journal, August 6, 2024, by Jesse Roman)***

Policymakers can't point to a couple of cities in different states, then pick and choose the data to fit their preconceived narrative. In the City of Los Angeles, we do NOT have a hydrant on every corner, a well-funded municipal fire department with outstanding response times, or nearly enough aerial ladders distributed throughout our city. We have the most understaffed big city fire department in America, water supply issues, not nearly enough functioning trucks and engines, and response times that far exceed the nationally accepted standards.

Common sense and any firefighter in the LAFD will tell you that two exits are better than one. Most recently, we saw a version of the chaos that can occur during a fire as residents in the Pacific Palisades were trying to evacuate from the community in their cars while fire engines were desperately trying to head the opposite way towards the fire. Residents couldn't get out, and firefighters couldn't get to the fire. This same problem will repeat in apartment buildings with up to six stories and only one way in and one way out. It's just not safe.

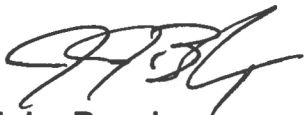
Unfortunately, recent policy and budget decisions have been made that will compromise public safety. In March of last year, voters passed the misleading "Healthy Streets Los Angeles" initiative that will only lead to slower emergency response times when your constituents need us the most. Then, earlier this year, the FY 2025-26 Budget was approved and included the elimination of 42 critical Emergency Incident Technician firefighter positions. We implore each one of you to stop this trend.

Our firefighters have no issue with building more housing, but safety requirements should never be reduced just because developers and self-appointed experts say that doing it the right way costs too much. If enacted, this ordinance will lead to more total occupants per building (by adding the two- and three-bedroom units) while simultaneously reducing the number of entrances/exits down to a single stairway. Adding more people with fewer options for evacuation and rescue is not a good idea for anyone. While this proposal may be well intentioned, there simply can't be a price tag placed on the safety of local families and our firefighters.

Finally, it's disheartening that we are having this discussion and sending this letter to you on the eve of the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the greatest tragedies that our country has ever experienced. We don't have to recap what happened on that fateful day, but we will point out the fact that it is never a good situation to have fewer exits and entrances and to have people race down while first responders race up in the same chaotic, confined spaces.

We thank you for your careful consideration of our position on this issue and respectfully ask you to vote NO on this draft ordinance when it comes to the full City Council.

Sincerely,



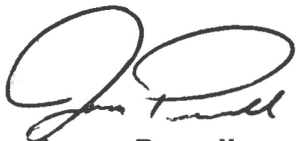
**John Bagala**  
IAFF L-112 Conservator



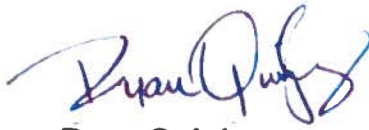
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CC: Mayor Karen Bass  
City Attorney Hydee Feldstein-Soto  
Interim Fire Chief Ronnie Villanueva  
Board of Fire Commissioners