

Communication from Public

Name: Franci Levine-Grater

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 12:14 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: On behalf of Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI), I am posting this public comment to fully support funding our LA City parks as part of the new charter. As a nonprofit that partners with community members to increase park and green space in under-resourced LA neighborhoods, LANI strongly urges the committee to protect the full funding percentage currently in the new charter. The City's own assessment identifies this as the parks' annual operating need. Any reduction puts our park system at risk. Furthermore, LANI opposes any delay of the vote to 2028. We advocate that the City keep doubling parks funding on the current timeline and preserve the sensible four-year phase-in. Our parks are essential infrastructure, and their maintenance has been woefully underfunded for far too long. The longer we wait to fund our parks adequately, the further we will fall behind in providing safe, clean, functioning amenities for Angelenos. Councilmembers should support their constituents' interests by maintaining the increased parks funding as proposed in the new charter as soon as possible. Thank you.

Communication from Public

Name: Tony Brown

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 09:16 AM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Heart of Los Angeles supports the amendment of Charter Section 593. Heart of Los Angeles works closely with Recreation and Parks and knows how important access to these funds would be.

Communication from Public

Name: Jonathan Burns

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 09:19 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Councilmembers, We have waited long enough for the following four LA Forward charter reform priorities. Please do not delay these to future committees. Pass these to full Council now, for inclusion on the November ballot: Expand the number of City Council Districts from 15 to 25 Allow the Chief of Police to remove officers with repeated histories of harm Ensure LAPD honors ordinances passed through normal City Council processes Additionally, although there were initial calls to action for a bifurcation or trifurcation of the Office of the City Attorney's responsibilities, we heard some council members express the need for more runway to fully reimagine the City Attorney's office. For now, we believe a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office is possible, via the creation of an Office of Legislative Counsel, which can handle the drafting of legislation for City Council. Thus, this makes up our fourth priority reform: Creating an Office of Legislative Counsel, to handle the drafting of legislation that is currently assigned to the City Attorney's office; this is a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office At LA Forward, we are excited about the opportunity to update the City Charter. We believe that part of the goal of charter reform is to strengthen trust between Angelenos and their local government. By strengthening representation through council expansion; clarifying authority to hold LAPD accountable; and depoliticizing the City Attorney's Office through the creation of an Office of Legislative Council, we believe we can do exactly that: continue to rebuild trust with the larger public. We hope the recommendations above are ones you can support for inclusion in the November ballot. Thank you, Jonathan

Communication from Public

Name: Veronica Pastore

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 10:16 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Councilmembers, We have waited long enough for the following four LA Forward charter reform priorities. Please do not delay these to future committees. Pass these to full Council now, for inclusion on the November ballot: Expand the number of City Council Districts from 15 to 25 Allow the Chief of Police to remove officers with repeated histories of harm Ensure LAPD honors ordinances passed through normal City Council processes Additionally, although there were initial calls to action for a bifurcation or trifurcation of the Office of the City Attorney's responsibilities, we heard some council members express the need for more runway to fully reimagine the City Attorney's office. For now, we believe a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office is possible, via the creation of an Office of Legislative Counsel, which can handle the drafting of legislation for City Council. Thus, this makes up our fourth priority reform: Creating an Office of Legislative Counsel, to handle the drafting of legislation that is currently assigned to the City Attorney's office; this is a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office At LA Forward, we are excited about the opportunity to update the City Charter. We believe that part of the goal of charter reform is to strengthen trust between Angelenos and their local government. By strengthening representation through council expansion; clarifying authority to hold LAPD accountable; and depoliticizing the City Attorney's Office through the creation of an Office of Legislative Council, we believe we can do exactly that: continue to rebuild trust with the larger public. We hope the recommendations above are ones you can support for inclusion in the November ballot. Thank you, Veronica Pastore Venice, California

Communication from Public

Name: Camille Nibungco

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 07:45 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Dear Councilmembers, We have waited long enough for the following four LA Forward charter reform priorities. Please do not delay these to future committees. Pass these to full Council now, for inclusion on the November ballot: - Expand the number of City Council Districts from 15 to 25 - Allow the Chief of Police to remove officers with repeated histories of harm - Ensure LAPD honors ordinances passed through normal City Council processes Additionally, although there were initial calls to action for a bifurcation or trifurcation of the Office of the City Attorney's responsibilities, we heard some council members express the need for more runway to fully reimagine the City Attorney's office. For now, we believe a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office is possible, via the creation of an Office of Legislative Counsel, which can handle the drafting of legislation for City Council. Thus, this makes up our fourth priority reform: Creating an Office of Legislative Counsel, to handle the drafting of legislation that is currently assigned to the City Attorney's office; this is a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office At LA Forward, we are excited about the opportunity to update the City Charter. We believe that part of the goal of charter reform is to strengthen trust between Angelenos and their local government. By strengthening representation through council expansion; clarifying authority to hold LAPD accountable; and depoliticizing the City Attorney's Office through the creation of an Office of Legislative Council, we believe we can do exactly that: continue to rebuild trust with the larger public. We hope the recommendations above are ones you can support for inclusion in the November ballot. I love LA and I genuinely want to see it thrive for future generations and I believe these 4 reforms will make LA a better city for everyone including you Councilmembers! Please seriously consider supporting these reforms! Thank you, Camille

Communication from Public

Name: Lydia L.

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 07:55 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Councilmembers, Angelenos have waited long enough for the following charter reform priorities. Pass these to full Council now, for inclusion on the November ballot: Expand the number of City Council Districts from 15 to 25 Allow the Chief of Police to remove officers with repeated histories of harm Ensure LAPD honors ordinances passed through normal City Council processes Additionally, although there were initial calls to action for a bifurcation or trifurcation of the Office of the City Attorney's responsibilities, we heard some council members express the need for more runway to fully reimagine the City Attorney's office. For now, we believe a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office is possible, via the creation of an Office of Legislative Counsel, which can handle the drafting of legislation for City Council. Thus, this makes up our fourth priority reform: Creating an Office of Legislative Counsel, to handle the drafting of legislation that is currently assigned to the City Attorney's office; this is a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office At LA Forward, we are excited about the opportunity to update the City Charter. We believe that part of the goal of charter reform is to strengthen trust between Angelenos and their local government. By strengthening representation through council expansion; clarifying authority to hold LAPD accountable; and depoliticizing the City Attorney's Office through the creation of an Office of Legislative Council, we believe we can do exactly that: continue to rebuild trust with the larger public. We hope the recommendations above are ones you will support for inclusion in the November ballot. Thank you, Lydia L.

Communication from Public

Name: Paul Vecchio

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 09:10 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Councilmembers, We have waited long enough for the following four LA Forward charter reform priorities. Please do not delay these to future committees. Pass these to full Council now, for inclusion on the November ballot: Expand the number of City Council Districts from 15 to 25 Allow the Chief of Police to remove officers with repeated histories of harm Ensure LAPD honors ordinances passed through normal City Council processes Additionally, although there were initial calls to action for a bifurcation or trifurcation of the Office of the City Attorney's responsibilities, we heard some council members express the need for more runway to fully reimagine the City Attorney's office. For now, we believe a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office is possible, via the creation of an Office of Legislative Counsel, which can handle the drafting of legislation for City Council. Thus, this makes up our fourth priority reform: Creating an Office of Legislative Counsel, to handle the drafting of legislation that is currently assigned to the City Attorney's office; this is a first step toward reimagining the City Attorney's office At LA Forward, we are excited about the opportunity to update the City Charter. We believe that part of the goal of charter reform is to strengthen trust between Angelenos and their local government. By strengthening representation through council expansion; clarifying authority to hold LAPD accountable; and depoliticizing the City Attorney's Office through the creation of an Office of Legislative Council, we believe we can do exactly that: continue to rebuild trust with the larger public. We hope the recommendations above are ones you can support for inclusion in the November ballot. Thank you, Paul Vecchio

Communication from Public

Name: Heather Sit

Date Submitted: 06/10/2026 02:22 PM

Council File No: 26-0489

Comments for Public Posting: Dear Council President Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martínez, Councilmember Nithya Raman, Councilmember Katy Yaroslavsky, Councilmember John Lee, and Committee Staff: On behalf of the Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (CAUSE), I am writing to share several documents related to Los Angeles City Charter Reform, including: • CAUSE's Public Comment Letter to the Charter Reform Commission • CAUSE's February 2026 Charter Reform White Paper and Community Convening Summary The attached materials document perspectives shared during CAUSE's February convening with Charter Reform Commissioners and leaders from organizations including Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJSOCAL), AAPI Equity Alliance, Asian Business Association (ABA), Korean American Democratic Committee (KADC), Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC), as well as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander advocates, legal service providers, small business leaders, and neighborhood stakeholders. Throughout the convening, participants repeatedly emphasized that Los Angeles' current council districts are too large to provide meaningful representation for the diverse communities that make up our city. Community leaders discussed how smaller districts could improve responsiveness, strengthen constituent access, and create greater opportunities for geographically dispersed communities of interest, including many AANHPI communities, to be visible within the political process. We appreciate that the Charter Reform Commission carefully considered this issue and ultimately recommended expanding the City Council from 15 to 25 districts. While participants expressed support for larger expansion proposals, there was broad agreement that maintaining the status quo is insufficient for a city as large and diverse as Los Angeles. The Commission's recommendation reflects more than a year of research, public testimony, community engagement, and deliberation. We respectfully urge the Committee to advance the Commission's recommendation directly to the ballot and avoid creating an additional commission, study process, or future review body to revisit council expansion. Los Angeles has already spent significant time studying this issue. The Charter Reform Commission has completed its work,

and voters should have the opportunity to decide whether the City's governing structure should evolve to better reflect the size, diversity, and needs of Los Angeles. Our 2022 multiethnic Los Angeles survey found that only 46% of AAPI residents felt well represented by elected and appointed city leaders, the lowest level among all major racial groups surveyed. At the same time, 67% of AAPI respondents supported increasing the size of the City Council. These findings reflect both a clear representation gap and strong support for structural reform. Thank you for your consideration and your leadership throughout this process. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further. Sincerely, Heather Sit Director of Strategic Operations Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (CAUSE)



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

**CAUSE BOARD
OFFICERS & DIRECTORS**

Chair
Charlie Woo
Megatoys

Vice Chair
Ralph Barnes
Consultant

Legal Counsel
James Hsu
Squire Patton Boggs

Secretary
Ben Wong
Public Affairs Consultant

Treasurer
James Choi
Cafe Dulce
Yoboseyo! Superette

Executive Director
Nancy Yap
CAUSE

Tami Bui
Turo

Wendy Greuel
Los Angeles Homeless
Services Authority

Alicia Hou
Akerman LLP

Victor King
Olivarez Madruga
Law Organization

Dan Schnur
University of Southern
California

Thomas Wong
Southern California Edison

Robert Yap
Dish Networks, Gen Mobile

February 25, 2026

Los Angeles City Charter Reform Commission
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of the Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (CAUSE) and the Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community leaders who joined us on February 23, thank you for meeting with us and engaging directly with our communities. As we shared, our purpose was not to introduce new proposals, but to ensure that AANHPI perspectives are meaningfully reflected in the recommendations already under consideration. This letter formalizes two priorities that CAUSE believes are especially critical at this stage: codifying comprehensive language access in the Charter and expanding the City Council.

Comprehensive Language Access in the Charter

Language access is not a courtesy. It is a civil right and a prerequisite for equal participation in civic life. Yet in Los Angeles, it is too often treated as discretionary, unevenly implemented, or dependent on shifting administrative priorities.

Codifying language access in the Charter would establish it as a binding, citywide obligation. At a minimum, this should include:

- A clear requirement that all departments provide meaningful language access
- Translation accuracy, qualified interpretation, and culturally competent outreach
- Dedicated and sustainable funding
- Transparent accountability and oversight mechanisms

In addition to operative provisions, a commitment to equitable communication could be reflected in the Charter's Preamble and guiding principles, signaling that language access is a core civic value and an interpretive standard for governance.

This is especially relevant as new structures are adopted. Implementation of noncitizen voting should include language access standards comparable to those for statewide elections. The Capital Investment Program should incorporate multilingual wayfinding and outreach that support immigrant-owned small businesses and strengthen participation in cultural districts.

Expansion of the City Council to 29 Districts

CAUSE and our partners strongly advocate for expanding the Los Angeles City Council to 29 single member districts.

With nearly 250,000 residents per district under the current model, councilmembers are asked to represent extraordinarily diverse populations across large geographic areas. During our meeting, community leaders emphasized that this scale limits responsiveness because elected officials cannot adequately address the immense diversity of needs within such large districts. Smaller districts would allow for greater responsiveness to neighborhood level conditions, including differences in income, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic needs. Fewer constituents per district would increase residents' access to their elected officials, particularly immigrant communities navigating complex systems, small businesses seeking city support, and working families advocating for local improvements.

Expansion is also essential for visibility and representation. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in Los Angeles are often dispersed across the city without concentrated geographic hubs, making representation especially difficult under the current 15 district model. Expanding to 29 districts creates a meaningful opportunity to strengthen their presence within districts and ensure their voices are more consistently heard in local governance.



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

**CAUSE BOARD
OFFICERS & DIRECTORS****Chair**Charlie Woo
Megatoys**Vice Chair**Ralph Barnes
Consultant**Legal Counsel**James Hsu
Squire Patton Boggs**Secretary**Ben Wong
Public Affairs Consultant**Treasurer**James Choi
Cafe Dulce
Yoboseyo! Superette**Executive Director**Nancy Yap
CAUSETami Bui
TuroWendy Greuel
Los Angeles Homeless
Services AuthorityAlicia Hou
Akerman LLPVictor King
Olivarez Madruga
Law OrganizationDan Schnur
University of Southern
CaliforniaThomas Wong
Southern California EdisonRobert Yap
Dish Networks, Gen Mobile

Our 2022 survey reinforces the public support for this reform. Sixty-one percent of voters overall supported increasing the size of the City Council, with support highest among AANHPI respondents at 67 percent. At the same time, only 46 percent of AANHPI respondents said people of their race or ethnicity are well represented by Los Angeles city government leaders, lower than every other major group surveyed. These findings underscore both strong support for structural reform and a clear representation gap that expansion can help address.

Los Angeles is one of the most diverse cities in the world. Structural reforms that improve access and responsiveness will strengthen not only AANHPI communities but the city as a whole.

With approximately one month remaining in this reform process, we encourage the Commission to ensure that the perspectives, stories, and concerns shared by AANHPI leaders are reflected in your remaining deliberations and final recommendations. CAUSE remains a resource and partner as you move forward, and we stand ready to continue supporting engagement that meaningfully serves all Angelenos.

We look forward to seeing these priorities reflected in your final work.

Sincerely,

Nancy Yap
Executive Director

With support from AANHPI community organizations and leaders, including:

AAPI Equity Alliance
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement
Korean American Democratic Committee
Southern California Pacific Islander Community Response Team (SoCal PICRT)



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

FEBRUARY 2026 CHARTER REFORM WHITE PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 23, 2026, CAUSE convened Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community leaders and stakeholders for a dialogue with Los Angeles City Charter Reform Commissioners. While current city structures often fail to reach these communities, this convening provided a platform to advocate for systemic changes in representation, language accessibility, and government accountability. This white paper serves as a record of the policy recommendations and community narratives shared.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Why Charter Reform is Happening: The City of Los Angeles is currently undergoing its first charter reform process since 1999. The energy for reform was triggered by a series of political scandals and a general crisis of public trust in City Hall. This constitutional review is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to restructure city government to be more ethical, transparent, and representative.

Missing Perspectives: The AANHPI community is a critical demographic in Los Angeles, yet many residents feel disconnected from city leadership. A 2022 multiethnic survey by CAUSE revealed that only 46% of AANHPI residents feel well-represented by elected and appointed city leaders - the lowest percentage among all major racial groups surveyed.

Building on CAUSE's ongoing work regarding redistricting and election administration, this convening served as a strategic dialogue to ensure the Commission appreciates the complexity of AANHPI communities. The goal is to move beyond romantic notions of inclusion and toward practical, codified structural reforms that protect the interests and accessibility of a community representing dozens of distinct ethnicities and languages.

With the City Charter Reform Commission currently evaluating the city's governing operating system, AANHPI leaders emphasized that reform is an art that requires proactive engagement and inspiration to solve deep-seated inequities. This meeting aimed to bridge the gap between these community insights and the formal commission process.

LOCATION: CAUSE Office

MATERIALS SHARED

- [Letter from CAUSE, re: LA City Charter Reform Commission's ad hoc committee](#)
- [Public Charter Reform Item Tracker](#)



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

COMMUNITY LEADERS IN ATTENDANCE (22)

- **LA City Charter Reform Commission**
 - Raymond Meza, Commission Chair
 - Justin Ramirez, Executive Director
 - Andrea Mac
 - Carla Fuentes
 - James Thomas
 - Michael Yap
 - Ted Stein
- **Community Organizations:**
 - **Lead:** CAUSE - Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (Charlie Woo (Board Chair), Nancy Yap, Heather Sit)
 - AAPI Equity Alliance - Asian American Pacific Islander Equity Alliance (Hoang Nguyen)
 - ABA - Asian Business Association (Dennis Huang)
 - AJSOCAL - Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (Benjamin Tran)
 - KADC - Korean American Democratic Committee (Esther Lim, Kenneth Ahn)
 - PWC - Pilipino Workers Center (Aquilina Soriano Versoza)
 - Thai CDC - Thai Community Development Center (Chanchanit Martorell)
- **Submitted Written Comments in Lieu of Attendance**
 - APIFM - Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement
 - SOCALPICRT - Southern California Pacific Islander Community Response Team
- **Additional Community Leaders Attending as Individuals**
 - Christen Marquez, UCLA Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Data Policy Lab
 - Godfrey Plata
 - Sydney Pike, Pacific Islander Health Partnership
 - Valentine Angeles, Political Policy Consultant
 - William Chao

KEY INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

- **Challenging the AANHPI Monolith:** A recurring theme was the danger of viewing the AANHPI community through a single lens. Leaders representing Filipino, Thai, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and South Asian interests emphasized that no single voice can represent the needs of diverse neighborhoods - from the working-class needs of the Thai community to the unique health disparities faced by the geographically dispersed Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations.
- **The Need for Council Expansion:** Participants broadly agreed that the current size of Los Angeles City Council districts limits meaningful engagement with many communities across the city. Leaders emphasized that expanding the number of districts would enable more responsive governance and greater opportunities for distinct communities of interest to be visible within districts. Several participants noted



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

that larger expansions, including proposals up to 29 districts, would further increase the likelihood that geographically dispersed AANHPI communities could be meaningfully represented.

- **Language Access as a Structural Necessity:** Current language access efforts are often treated as discretionary and are frequently underfunded. Leaders highlighted that city departments often cite a “lack of budget” as a reason for failing to provide translation or interpretation services. There is a collective demand to move these protections out of temporary executive orders and into the City Charter to ensure they are mandatory and fully-funded.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

1. **Advancing Meaningful Council Expansion:** Following this discussion, and informed by research from community coalitions and academic partners, CAUSE will continue advocating for meaningful expansion of the Los Angeles City Council to reduce district size and strengthen representation for communities across the city. Increasing the number of districts and reducing district size would help ensure that geographically dispersed AANHPI communities of interest are not diluted or split across multiple districts. Smaller districts also enable more localized governance, allowing council offices to better understand and respond to the cultural, linguistic, and economic dynamics of the neighborhoods they serve. This structure creates greater opportunity for distinct AANHPI ethnic communities to be visible within districts and strengthens engagement and accountability between residents and their elected representatives.
 2. **Pursuing Language Access as a Charter Right:** Following this discussion, CAUSE will advocate for the incorporation of language access protections into the Los Angeles City Charter. Establishing language access at the Charter level would create a durable, citywide obligation to ensure that communications, programs, and civic processes are accessible across the languages spoken by Los Angeles residents. By embedding this principle in the Charter, the City can move beyond discretionary policies and temporary executive actions and instead require departments to adopt and maintain policies that support consistent communication with the cultural and linguistic communities of Los Angeles.
-



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES INFORMING CHARTER REFORM

The following accounts reflect perspectives shared by community leaders, advocates, and practitioners during the February 23 convening with members of the Los Angeles City Charter Reform Commission. Participants spoke from their professional and lived experiences working with AANHPI communities across Los Angeles. These narratives illustrate how residents encounter city systems in practice and highlight the challenges, barriers, and opportunities discussed during the meeting. They are included to document the range of experiences raised in the conversation and do not represent a unified position among participants.

1. Council Expansion & Local Representation

Community leaders described how the size of current council districts makes it difficult for elected officials to meaningfully engage with the many distinct AANHPI communities across Los Angeles.

- **On the Need for Local Representation:** Former planning commissioners and neighborhood leaders described council districts that are simply too large and too diverse for one office to serve effectively. When a single district spans multiple immigrant enclaves with very different needs, no community receives sufficient attention. Leaders noted that smaller districts would allow councilmembers to walk neighborhood corridors, understand hyper-local conditions, and remain accountable to distinct AAPI and NHPI communities rather than treating them as one undifferentiated block.
- **On Diverse Needs Within “AAPI” Labels:** Leaders stressed that “AAPI” represents dozens of communities with different income levels, health outcomes, and languages. In practice, the most visible and resourced segments often receive attention, while low-wage, undocumented, and linguistically isolated residents remain unseen. Participants noted that smaller districts would make it easier for council offices to recognize these differences and respond to the specific needs of individual ethnic communities.

2. Language Access and Civic Accessibility

Leaders described language barriers as a structural obstacle to participation in many city processes, from planning and public safety to workplace protections and healthcare access.

- **On Language Rights as a Human Right:** Worker center organizers framed language access as a basic human right. When interpretation is delayed or unavailable, wage theft cases stall, healthcare visits are postponed, and workers who live paycheck to paycheck go longer without pay they are already owed. Language, they noted, is not a “nice to have”; it is the gatekeeper to many other rights.
- **On Differences in Language Usage:** A Filipino advocate noted that even English-speaking workers can face barriers in legal or medical settings. While many Filipinos speak English fluently, the use and frequency of certain terms can differ from those commonly used in U.S. legal or healthcare systems. In high-stakes situations, those subtle differences can lead to misunderstandings for individuals who appear fluent on paper but are navigating unfamiliar terminology.



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

- **On the City's Unfunded Language Mandates:** Community organizations that helped advise on Mayor Garcetti's language access executive order described it as an important step forward. However, they also noted that the policy was adopted without dedicated funding. As a result, they observed a recurring pattern: language access commitments exist in theory, but translation, interpretation, and bilingual staffing are often unavailable in practice.
- **On Planning Without Translation:** A former Planning Commissioner recounted efforts to encourage the department to translate planning notices and public documents. Without translated materials, residents cannot meaningfully review environmental reports or planning proposals that may affect their businesses, housing stability, or neighborhood conditions.
- **On Everyday Crime Reporting Without Language Support:** One advocate described helping an elderly Cantonese-speaking neighbor report a burglary. Because there was no reliable language support available, the report was relayed through multiple people: the neighbor spoke to the advocate's mother in Cantonese, the mother translated to English, and the advocate then conveyed the information to the police. Participants described this type of informal "telephone chain" as a common workaround when language access protocols are unclear or unavailable.

3. Worker Rights, Wage Theft & Economic Justice

Worker advocates described how gaps in enforcement and language access affect many low-wage immigrant workers across Los Angeles.

- **On the Wage Theft:** Advocates cited estimates that workers in Los Angeles lose roughly \$25 million per week to wage theft. Participants noted that while the City has adopted minimum wage protections, enforcement capacity often does not match the scale or complexity of violations. As a result, community organizations, along with County and State agencies, frequently step in to assist workers seeking to recover unpaid wages.
- **On City Wage Enforcement Efforts That Don't Match the Complexity of Violations:** Frontline worker advocates explained that the City's Office of Wage Standards primarily addresses minimum wage violations and certain retaliation claims. However, many cases involving low-wage workers center on overtime violations or missed meal and rest breaks. Participants noted that these gaps can make it difficult for workers to find support through existing city enforcement mechanisms.
- **On Underground Economies and Trafficking:** A Thai community leader described an underground economy in which low-wage, often undocumented Thai workers experience significant exploitation. With an estimated 40–50 percent of the community lacking legal status, participants described a continuum of abuse ranging from unpaid wages to coercive labor practices. Advocates noted that limited enforcement and language barriers can make it difficult for workers in these situations to seek help.



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

4. Deportation Defense, Right to Counsel & Immigrant Safety

Community leaders described how gaps in legal protection and misunderstandings of immigration status create fear, instability, and barriers to safety for many immigrant and Pacific Islander communities.

- **On the “State of Fear” in Immigrant Communities:** Organizations reported that in some sub-communities, roughly half of residents may lack legal immigration status. Without guaranteed access to legal counsel in deportation proceedings, participants described families living in a constant state of fear. Some reported keeping children home from school, avoiding health clinics, or hesitating to report crimes out of concern that any interaction with authorities could lead to detention or deportation.
- **On Trafficking Victims Treated as Criminals:** Legal advocates described cases in which individuals identified as labor trafficking survivors were arrested or detained rather than protected. In some instances, victims were transferred to detention facilities far from Los Angeles before attorneys could intervene. Participants noted that these situations highlight the challenges trafficking survivors face when legal protections are not consistently recognized.
- **On COFA and U.S. National Migrants Being Misunderstood:** Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander leaders explained that migrants from American Samoa and Compact of Free Association (COFA) nations, such as the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau, are lawfully present in the United States under special statuses. However, participants shared examples in which local authorities were unfamiliar with these documents, leading to confusion or suspicion toward individuals who were legally present.
- **On Healthcare and Deportation Fear:** Advocates described how many Pacific Islanders travel to Los Angeles for cancer treatment or specialized medical care that is unavailable in their home islands. Participants shared concerns that enforcement actions involving individuals seeking medical care can create fear within these communities, discouraging others from pursuing treatment even when their health depends on it.
- **On How Lack of Counsel Hurts the Whole City:** Speakers emphasized that deportation proceedings affect not only individuals but entire families and neighborhoods. With approximately 40 percent of Los Angeles residents being immigrants and roughly one in five children having at least one undocumented parent, participants noted that the removal of a family member can have ripple effects across households, workplaces, schools, and local economies.

5. Youth & Non-Citizen Voting

Advocates shared stories illustrating how young people and non-citizen residents often carry significant civic and household responsibilities while having limited formal voice in local decision-making.

- **On Youth Carrying Adult Responsibilities:** NHPI advocates described how many 16- and 17-year-olds regularly translate at doctor’s appointments, complete government forms, and contribute to their household income. In some cases, young people leave school early to work full-time or take informal jobs to help sustain their families.



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

Participants noted the contrast between these responsibilities and the lack of opportunities for youth to participate directly in civic decision-making.

- **On Breaking Cycles of Civic Non-Participation:** Several speakers noted that in many immigrant households, civic participation is rarely discussed because parents may come from countries without strong traditions of democratic engagement. Participants suggested that allowing 16-year-olds to vote in city and LAUSD elections, particularly when paired with civic education, could help establish habits of participation earlier in life.
- **On Youth Defending Critical School Programs:** Community members referenced debates around programs such as the Black Student Achievement Plan as examples of how school board decisions directly affect students' daily lives. Some participants argued that youth participation in school district elections could allow students a greater voice in decisions that shape their educational environment.
- **On Non-Citizen Families and Household Voice:** Participants also described multi-generational households in which elders or parents may be non-citizens or hold immigration statuses that prevent them from voting. In these situations, youth in the household may be the only potential voters. Advocates suggested that youth or non-citizen voting proposals could create opportunities for families heavily affected by city and school policies to have some representation in civic processes.

6. Police Accountability & Public Safety

Speakers highlighted experiences with law enforcement that reflect ongoing concerns related to accountability, language access, and trust between public safety institutions and immigrant communities.

- **On Protest and Police Violence:** Immigrant worker organizers recalled peaceful May Day marches where demonstrators were injured during confrontations with the LAPD. Subsequent litigation found that the force used in some instances was unlawful, resulting in significant legal settlements. Participants described these experiences as shaping how many immigrant communities view calls for police accountability.
- **On Mental Health Crises Turned Deadly:** Leaders referenced cases such as Yong Yang in Koreatown and Angelo Quinto in Northern California, where families called for assistance during mental health crises, and the encounters ended in fatalities. Participants shared these examples to illustrate concerns that current emergency response systems may not be equipped to safely address mental health situations.
- **On Language Access and Basic Police Functions:** Advocates described conversations with law enforcement personnel about how officers communicate with limited-English-proficient residents. In one exchange, an officer indicated that they would attempt to contact a third-party translator "whenever they can." Participants noted that these types of ad hoc solutions highlight the absence of consistent language access protocols in some policing situations.
- **On U-Visas and Missing LAPD Protocols:** Legal service providers discussed federal U-Visa protections, which allow undocumented victims of certain crimes to cooperate with law enforcement without immediate risk of deportation. Participants noted that the



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

process requires certification from local authorities and expressed concern that there is not always a consistent internal protocol for handling these requests.

- **On Survivors Discouraged From Reporting Sexual Assault:** A youth program leader shared the experience of a young intern who sought help after a sexual assault shortly after arriving in Los Angeles. According to the account shared, the initial police response involved questioning the survivor's actions and clothing, and hesitancy to take a report. Participants described the experience as an example of how survivors may feel discouraged from seeking help through formal systems.
- **On Basic Crime Reporting Without Language Support:** An advocate recounted assisting an elderly Cantonese-speaking neighbor who had experienced a burglary. Because language support was not immediately available, the report was relayed through several people who translated in sequence before reaching law enforcement. Participants described similar situations as evidence of how language barriers can complicate even basic interactions with public safety systems.

7. Public Advocate & Structural Accountability

Participants discussed the potential role of a Public Advocate as an independent mechanism to help residents navigate city government and address systemic barriers to access and accountability.

- **On the Public Advocate as an "Artful" Solution:** One participant described structural reform as "an art, not a science," suggesting that a Public Advocate could function as a flexible tool for addressing multiple gaps in city systems. In this framing, the office could provide residents with a more accessible entry point into a complex municipal structure that many find difficult to navigate.
- **On Holding Together a Deeply Diverse City:** Another speaker reflected on Los Angeles' identity as a global city whose economic strength is closely tied to its diversity. At the same time, they suggested that city institutions have not always kept pace with the challenge of maintaining civic connections across many communities. The participant described a Public Advocate as a role that could focus on how policies affect communities that often feel excluded from decision-making.
- **On Power Imbalances Between Residents and Council Offices:** Participants with experience in public affairs described how the current structure can create perceived power imbalances between residents and individual council offices. Because council offices control many neighborhood-level services, some residents worry that raising concerns about a councilmember could affect their ability to access assistance. A citywide Public Advocate was described as a potential counterbalance that could help residents raise concerns outside of district-level political dynamics.
- **On Learning From (But Improving On) Other Models:** Participants also discussed existing Public Advocate structures in other cities, including New York. While some noted limitations in those models, several suggested that Los Angeles could establish a stronger, more independent office, potentially tasked with identifying systemic barriers in areas such as language access, small-business support, and access to city services.



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

8. Economic Development, Procurement & Small Business Support

Community and business leaders described structural barriers that limit immigrant-owned small businesses' ability to access city programs, procurement opportunities, and economic development resources.

- **On Capital Investment and Procurement Barriers:** During the convening, community leaders expressed concerns about the rigidity of the City's capital improvement and procurement processes and their impact on immigrant-owned small businesses. Participants suggested that a more flexible and coordinated Capital Improvement Program could better support ethnic commercial corridors through language-accessible outreach, infrastructure improvements such as lighting and streetscape investments, and marketing support, as Los Angeles prepares for major global events such as the World Cup and the 2028 Olympics.
- **On City Programs That Don't Fit Immigrant Small Businesses:** Business advocates described how many AAPI immigrant-owned shops in Koreatown, Thai Town, Historic Filipinotown, and other corridors may appear successful from the outside but face significant barriers to accessing city resources. One leader shared that their organization ultimately stepped away from a City of Los Angeles small business contract because the city's systems were too rigid, English-dominant, and heavily online-based to effectively serve their limited-English-proficient clients. They noted that similar contracts with County and State agencies, which offered more flexibility, were functioning more effectively.
- **On the Limits of the BusinessSource Center Model:** Community development practitioners discussed the City's BusinessSource Centers as a well-intentioned model that often misses many immigrant entrepreneurs in practice. Participants noted that for many small businesses in their networks, the centers lack sufficient bilingual staff, culturally competent advising, and user-friendly processes. As a result, some immigrant-owned businesses do not view the centers as resources they can realistically access.
- **On Language as a Barrier to Certification and Procurement:** One participant described helping an AAPI small business navigate the city's procurement and certification platforms. Even for someone fluent in English and familiar with government systems, the process was described as confusing and time-consuming. For business owners whose primary language is Korean, Thai, Tagalog, or Chinese, participants suggested that the platforms can be especially difficult to navigate, limiting participation in city contracting opportunities.
- **On Perception vs. Reality for AAPI Businesses:** The Asian Business Association noted that the visible success of some AAPI-owned enterprises can create a perception that these businesses are broadly thriving. However, participants emphasized that many small or undercapitalized businesses still face significant barriers to accessing city contracting or growth opportunities. The organization noted that, despite decades of work to address contracting inequities, many promising businesses still struggle to enter city procurement pipelines.



Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment

- **On Missed Opportunities in Cultural Districts:** Leaders from cultural corridors such as Thai Town and other heritage districts described efforts to strengthen local economies through cultural tourism, small business support, and neighborhood development initiatives. Participants noted that without tailored investment in infrastructure, marketing, and language-accessible business assistance, the communities that host cultural events and attract visitors often see limited long-term economic benefit.
- **On Tying Economic Development to Language and Access:** Across testimonies, speakers repeatedly connected economic development to language access and structural accessibility. Participants emphasized that programs related to procurement, contracting, and small business support may remain out of reach if key materials, application systems, and compliance processes are accessible primarily to English-speaking, technologically fluent business owners.