

Dear City Clerk and Members of the Council,

Betsy Myers was born in this city. She grew up in Los Angeles. She learned what leadership means not in a classroom but in the streets and neighborhoods of this town. What she teaches now — that leadership is a choice, not a title — is a truth forged right here, where this Council sits, where millions of Angelenos live and struggle and hope.

Tomorrow, the Metro Board of Directors will vote on a \$9.7 billion budget. That budget funds the surveillance apparatus that watches me and thousands like me every day. It funds the Transit Watch app that classifies homeless riders as security incidents. It funds the Hayden AI cameras that capture our images at every stop. It funds the weapons detection pilot that scans platforms in real time. It funds the Department of Public Safety that is consolidating all of this under one command — a command whose predecessors in the LAPD Transit Services Bureau just generated a whistleblower settlement on May 18, nine days ago, after retaliating against a captain who reported the misuse of Metro-funded personnel.

That same budget was amended after the public hearing closed. On May 21, the Finance Committee added 76 additional employees to the Department of Public Safety, \$5.6 million more in funding, and authorized the CEO to extend law enforcement contracts for years longer. The public never had a chance to speak on this expanded scope. This Council, whose members represent the very people who will be watched and tracked and profiled by that expansion, has not yet taken a public position demanding that the vote be delayed until transparency is delivered.

Betsy Myers teaches that authentic leaders do not wait for permission. They act when action is required. Stephen Covey teaches that between stimulus and response there is a space, and in that space we choose. Right now, this Council has a choice. You can remain silent while a \$9.7 billion surveillance machine is approved on an incomplete public record. Or you can stand up and demand what any responsible steward of public money should demand: transparency before the vote.

Specifically, I ask this Council to call on the Metro Board today to delay tomorrow's vote on the Department of Public Safety line items until four documents are produced and made public:

1. A civil rights impact assessment of all AI surveillance tools deployed by the DPS, including the weapons detection pilot and the real-time CCTV analytics.
2. A public report on the data flows between the Transit Watch app, the Homeless Management Information System, and the Coordinated Entry System — so that the public can see whether transit security data is being used to algorithmically deny shelter.
3. A public itemization of the \$524.5 million Professional and Technical Services line in the FY25 Audited Financial Statements, so that the public can see how much of that half-billion dollars is going to the LAPD contract, private security, and AI vendors.
4. A public summary of the \$150 million litigation settlement approved by the Board in September 2025 — including the project name, the contractor, and the nature of the claim — so that the largest liability on Metro's books is no longer a secret.

These are not radical demands. They are the bare minimum of transparency for an agency spending 9.7 billion of public money and operating a police force that is absorbing a command culture with a documented history of retaliation and secrecy. The City Attorney's own bi-monthly reports show that the City paid 226 million in settlements last fiscal year alone — including over 17 million in whistleblower retaliation cases. Captain Peter Whittingham, a direct subordinate of then-Deputy Chief Bill Scott at South Bureau, received 370,000 for his own retaliation claim. This pattern is real. It is documented. And it is being continued with tomorrow's vote unless this Council and others demand otherwise.

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Betsy Myers has said that the best leaders are the ones who show up. They show up for the hard conversations. They show up for the people who cannot get in the room. This Council can show up today. You can make a statement that will be in the public record before tomorrow's vote. You can tell the Metro Board that Los Angeles deserves transparency before another dollar is spent.

The election is six days away. The next mayor will inherit this machine. I am asking you to make sure they inherit the truth as well.

I will be at the Metro Board meeting tomorrow morning, in person, to deliver this message directly. I ask this Council to stand with me — if not in body, then in voice.

Respectfully,

Jonathan M. Portela



PUBLIC COMMENT – May 27, 2026, 10:00 a.m. – The Leadership Los Angeles Must Now Show

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Wed, May 27, 2026 at 9:39 AM

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