People’s State of the City 2019 - Keynote Address

The organizers of this event would like to dedicate this year’s presentation to two important community leaders who have passed on this year: Jose Landino, a tenacious worker leader who was instrumental in the fight to improve hospitality in our city; and Concepcion Garcia, a passionate community leader for children and parents in Central Long Beach. Let us honor their legacy by continuing to fight for justice!

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Cynthia Macias

The people in that video represent the community I come from. We may face uphill battles, but we are strong. We may be tired, but we are fighters. We may not have money, but we are powerful. We are the people that give Long Beach its wealth.

We know a better Long Beach is possible. And we know what stands in our way: discrimination based off who we are and greed for more and more money. This is why we fight, and this is why we take care of each other, even when the violence we face is invisible.

Three years ago, local artist Jumakae performed at the People’s State of the City and proclaimed: “If a city were a body, graffiti would show you where it hurts.” Graffiti may look nasty to some people, but it’s a visible expression of all the emotional trauma we endure.

There used to be a lot of graffiti outside one of the many apartments I used to rent in Long Beach. That graffiti was a warning of what was inside those apartment walls! Roaches! Bed bugs! Unrealistic rent increases! Racism! A stingy landlord! A definition of trauma is “emotional shock following a stressful event, like a deeply disturbing experience.”

Good evening all. My name is Cynthia Macias, and I am a proud mom of four kids, a renter, a community activist, and proud to have been born and raised in this city. When I think about the emotional trauma my kids and I went through, I can’t help but think about how I’m not alone. I think about all the other families like mine that are dealing with the same problems throughout the city. That ain’t right, y’all. Not in our Long Beach.

But you know what else ain’t right? Knowing that people have faced rising rents, unfair evictions, and violent displacement out of the city over the past few years and our city leaders have not passed strong laws to protect renters. Even worse, they’ve spent more time behind closed doors talking to some of the wealthiest people in the city to build a whole baseball stadium in Downtown Long Beach: ground zero for gentrification and displacement in our city. Yes, we are going there.

Everyone knows we’ve been in a housing crisis. But building an entirely new stadium for the Angels baseball team would speed up the displacement of poor people and drive rents up even more—especially because our elected officials have come out against rent control.
This isn't imaginary—renters in Inglewood are already feeling the impact and paying the price of new stadium developments.¹ Not to mention the fact that cities like St. Louis who spent millions of dollars to build their stadium are now left with millions in debt.²

And who pays the biggest price when all of this happens? Low-income people, undocumented people, and people of color who are most vulnerable. All of us at the expense of wealthy investors looking to profit off the displacement of our communities for more and more luxury housing. We have a responsibility to defend our homes and our communities, and you best believe that we will fight.

But displacement doesn’t come just from gentrification and people being forced out of their homes—it also comes from unjust and immoral immigration laws. No matter what the cause, we gather here today to unapologetically say, “no displacement!” (chant and repeat)

While so many in our community are facing displacement and the violence of losing their homes, we must recognize that it impacts us differently.

For seniors, the hope of being able to “age in place” in our city is shrinking. As many as a third of senior households with people over the age of 65 have household incomes smaller than $25,000 a year.³ The threat of senior homelessness is real y’all.

For adults, Black and Latina women bear the biggest burden when it comes to rising rents and housing affordability.⁴ These are the women who hold our families together and are the backbone of our society. You know because women run the world. And we are getting pushed out onto the street and out of the city.

This is how fight: with our seniors, with our Black and Latina women, and with our undocumented community. This will take all of us coming together.

In June last year, thousands of people took over the streets from Cesar Chavez Park to the federal building on Ocean Boulevard to call for abolishing ICE and keeping families together. It was the largest march for immigrant justice in Long Beach history. “No displacement!”

In November last year, tenants at a building on Cedar Avenue in Downtown organized and won the “hashtag” Cedar Resistance, the longest rent strike in recent city history and successfully won respect and justice for their families. “No displacement!”

¹ One of California’s last black enclaves threatened by Inglewood’s stadium deal, Los Angeles Times
² With NFL Rams gone, St. Louis still stuck with stadium debt, Reuters
³ PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Economic Vitality, February 2019
⁴ PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Economic Vitality, February 2019
In February, immigrant communities with the Sanctuary Long Beach campaign continued their winning streak by establishing a city-funded deportation defense fund. Because of that organizing, there is now $350,000 for low-income immigrant residents to get legal representation in deportation cases, regardless of their history with the justice system. “No displacement!”

Now, members with the Sanctuary campaign are taking the next step in protecting immigrants by relaunching the effort formerly known as “Migra Watch” as “the Long Beach Community Defense Network:” a grassroots network of trained community members to respond to ICE arrests and organize support for families—run by the community and for the community. Join the Community Defense Network at a launch press conference a week from today at 10:00am at St. Luke’s Church on 7th and Atlantic. “No displacement!”

Just last week, after years and years and YEARS of pushing, Long Beach renters won the first-ever local tenant protection policy to keep people in homes and help prevent people from living on the streets. Very soon, renters in the city will get money from their landlords if they are displaced from their units without a good reason or have a rent increase over 10% in one year. This is a big first step towards giving working people the help we need. Give it up for all the parents, young people, disability activists, and seniors who came out and spoke at city council to share their stories! “No displacement!”

And once again, over twenty organizations are bringing the community together on May 1st to continue building power and solidarity for all working people by organizing the annual May Day march and rally. Let’s hit the streets with the May Day Long Beach coalition once again on Wednesday, May 1st as we take it back to the heart of our city and march from MacArthur Park in Cambodia Town to MLK Park. One last time: “No displacement!”

The racial generation gap is large. 86% of young people in Long Beach are of color compared to just 47% of seniors. If we care about the future of this city, we need to pay attention to young people of color and their needs NOW. That means youth investment in education, the environment, and sustainable GOOD jobs through trades and college preparation.

With the recent headlines celebrating the economic boom, we have been given the impression that the city is creating a path into prosperity, but this all depends on who you ask. In the past few years, Long Beach has been growing low wage jobs. Income inequality has not gone anywhere. In fact, the middle class, although becoming more diverse color wise, is shrinking. Together, our city has a smaller number of upper class families and a greater share of low-income families than in the past. The barriers to prosperity for working people are growing.

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5 PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Demography, February 2019
6 PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Economic Vitality, February 2019
Black workers are bearing the brunt of unemployment. Eighteen percent of Black high school graduates are unemployed and for the Black community in general that number can go as high as thirty-two percent in some census tracts in Long Beach.\(^7\)

Today, a record nine million people with a disability work in the United States. Yet, many individuals with a disability work in lower paying jobs and are less likely to work full-time and year-round. And when you compare that to the rest of the able bodied workforce, workers with a disability earn 66 cents for every dollar than those with no disability earn.\(^8\)

So how do we as a community create good paying jobs? One answer is local hiring. Local hiring means that people who live in the city or are disadvantaged are prioritized for jobs created by public dollars. Our own tax dollars come back into the city through these job opportunities for the community. Makes sense, right?

Community Benefit Agreements are laws that create local hiring like this. We as a community have a right to ask for this when public resources like city-owned land is being developed, and that any project benefits the people in a community. Those benefits might include living-wage construction and permanent jobs, low-income housing, space for community organizations, public green spaces, and the list goes on depending on the needs and demands of the community.

It can seem impossible to win community benefits from large, wealthy developers and corporations, but we proved this is possible by winning Measure WW this past November. When the city council brought this for a vote and a majority of our elected leaders failed to approve it, working women decided to take matters into their own hands. With sixty-four percent of the vote, working women in Long Beach now have real protection from sexual predators, a humane workload, and the ability to opt out of forced overtime. Let’s give it up for all the women hotel workers and community members who threw down to help WW pass at the ballot box!

Twenty-four port truck drivers also proved this was possible when they were awarded nearly $6 million in a legal settlement after they organized to prove that their wages were illegally being stolen by their trucking company.\(^9\) Let’s give it up for those who are fighting for their families and their livelihoods!

Unfortunately, the fight for justice with warehouse workers in the port is far from over as their company bosses decided it would be easier to just leave and abandon the workers instead of reach an agreement with them. These workers are continuing to organize and work on

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\(^7\) PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Economic Vitality, February 2019
\(^8\) [Do People With Disabilities Earn Equal Pay?](https://www.census.gov) - United States Census Bureau
\(^9\) [Port Truck Drivers Awarded $6 Million; Drivers’ Manager Held Responsible For Wage Theft](https://www.justiceforportdrivers.org), www.JusticeForPortDrivers.org
solutions. Tonight, we all gather in support and solidarity with the warehouse workers as they work towards a solution with respect and dignity!

Our fight for dignity and respect in our workplaces is a noble fight, but these environments don’t just happen in a vacuum—the jobs we hold are part of a broader ecosystem that relies on our labor and what we give and take. This ecosystem includes the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat to nourish our bodies.

When we deplete our resources in an unsustainable manner for the sake of money, we are the ones who pay. It’s up to us to be the protectors of our communities. That is why we stand with the indigenous Tongva and Acjachemen tribes against oil drilling in the Los Cerritos Wetlands and the further destruction of any native lands.

It’s up to us to be the ones to protect our earth and resources. It’s a lesson that young people and adults are learning as they begin to clean-up Central, West, and North Long Beach with the Just Environment Long Beach campaign. The more we can work towards improving our communities and learning about why they are polluted in the first place, the sooner we can work towards living in a just and fair environment for all.

And because of the education and organizing done by low-income people in Long Beach, voters took on the challenge of providing a solution to our ongoing water crisis by passing Measure W in LA County. Now, nearly $5 million a year will be coming to Long Beach to “unpave the city” and build the infrastructure low-income neighborhoods desperately need to capture, clean, and use stormwater for us to be healthier. The best part is that giant corporations like Chevron will be paying the most for this. Now that is justice!

Make some noise for all the people and communities groups out there fighting against environmental racism and working towards a healthy Long Beach for all!

Dawn Modkins
Give up another round of applause for all the community members who wrote and performed that beautiful poem for us tonight.

Good evening everyone. I’m Dawn Modkins, a community and union organizer, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, Long Beach chapter, healer in many ways, and unapologetically Black. I’m honored to deliver the next leg of the People’s State of the City to you all tonight.

It is probably no surprise that Long Beach is overwhelmingly people of color: Black, Latino, Cambodian, Filipino, Samoan, Asian and Pacific Islander—you get the idea, we are a lot. The

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10 NFI abandons workers at Port of LA rather than reach agreement to end labor disruptions, www.JusticeForPortDrivers.org
11 L.A. County stormwater tax officially passes, Los Angeles Times
12 PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Demography, February 2019
historical data from the recent PolicyLink Equity Profile illustrates this pretty well. Yet we also know we aren’t seeing our government make decisions based on our reality.

This kind of mismatch is institutional and systemic. Take the City’s Budget Oversight Committee for example, which is the city council committee that makes budget recommendations to the full city council. In the 16 years that this committee has existed, council districts in East Long Beach have been represented the most but council districts 1 and 9 in Central and North Long Beach have never been represented.

So when it comes to making decisions on where and how to spend the city’s money, wealthier and whiter communities have been overrepresented, while lower-income communities of color have not been taken into consideration—which has helped to perpetuate inequality based on race and class. Mayor Robert Garcia has the authority to appoint council members to the committee, so tonight, we call on him to address this injustice.

Our city leaders must stop making decisions purely for the minority, and start governing--in good faith--for the majority of all of us. At the root of it, as a city we are not investing in the right things to change these negative patterns that the data show and that we see everyday in our communities.

That’s why the people have decided to take matters into our own hands and reclaim what it means to create a city budget that prioritizes people over corporate investment. For the first time in the city’s history, several campaigns came together to unveil “The People’s Budget,” a community plan to make the city budget more equitable so city resources actually match the need in specific communities. Let’s hear it for the hard working community members who put their sweat and tears into putting the People’s Budget together!

And you know what the best part was? The People’s Budget delivered over $600,000 in public funding for these priorities, including language justice, immigrant rights, and youth opportunity. This was a direct result of community members showing up to budget hearings, testifying in front of city leaders, and staying in council meetings past midnight to ensure their priorities were included. Give a big round of applause for all the people who made this a reality!

With the People’s Budget, the immigrant community was able to ensure that language justice continues to be a priority within the city. No one should be excluded from democracy because of their native language.

The best part about the People’s Budget was the strong, energetic, and fierce young people leading the “Invest in Youth campaign.” Together after months and months of survey collection, organizing, and schooling adults about what they need, youth were successful in getting the first ever “Long Beach Children and Youth Fund” established with $200,000 to develop a youth-led strategic plan. This fund will help make positive youth investments a reality and give every young person in the city an opportunity to succeed.
But a bank account is nothing without direct deposit! Establishing a fund and a strategic plan is a great first step, but if we don’t think about how we support young people in a more holistic and transformative way, then we perpetuate this status quo: young people will continue to have fewer opportunities, LGBTQ youth will continue to face homophobia and transphobia, and youth incarceration will never be addressed. Big problems require big solutions.

That’s why youth leaders with the Invest in Youth campaign will begin collecting signatures this summer for a new local ballot measure to ensure dedicated funding to the Children and Youth Fund. This would mean much needed resources so that every young person can have tutoring to help pass their classes, participate in after school community programs, and get job opportunities that support sustainable lives. If we can give forty-four percent of our general fund to the police department, can’t we spend a little more on children and youth?

With this Invest in Youth ballot measure, Long Beach would not only be the first city in Southern California to do this, but we would join other cities like Richmond, Baltimore\textsuperscript{13}, and San Francisco\textsuperscript{14} that have dedicated funding for children and young people as well. Shoot, Oakland has been doing this for over 20 years, and there’s no reason Long Beach cannot do this. It’s time we give young people the love and investment they deserve! If you Love, Believe, and Care for young people, then make sure you find a youth leader in the lobby to pledge your support, time, and signatures to help pass this important ballot measure!

Speaking of the November 2020 ballot, Long Beach will be part of a large statewide effort to finally fix funding for schools and communities. With the statewide Make It Fair campaign, communities historically devastated by Proposition 13 will have the opportunity to close corporate loopholes and make wealthy corporations pay their fair share in property taxes. If this measure passes, Long Beach will see over $25 million dollars into our city budget.\textsuperscript{15} This means new opportunities for better parks, libraries, affordable housing, community health, and so much more for us all.

We aren’t just coming for city funding, we’re coming for school funding too! In the Long Beach Unified School District, every student matters and high-needs students deserve the extra time and support. Thanks to a legal complaint filed by parents and community groups AND the LA County Office of Education’s determination that LBUSD misspent $24 million dollars, we won a settlement that is now delivering much needed resources to students.\textsuperscript{16}

Because of this win, high-needs students will now have more free tutoring and Family Resource Centers at schools will provide mental health assistance and social-emotional counseling. On

\textsuperscript{13} Baltimore Funding Model Challenges ‘Nonprofit Industrial Complex’ Practices, Colorlines
\textsuperscript{14} Four communities in California turn to voters to help fund children's programs, EdSource
\textsuperscript{15} Policy Brief: Impacts on Los Angeles County from Commercial Property Tax Reform, December 2018, Make It Fair campaign
\textsuperscript{16} County Office of Education Rules that LBUSD Misallocated $24 Million for High-Needs Students, Long Beach Post
top of those services, community groups have now forced the school district to make the Local Control Accountability Plan more accessible through community forums. Now, more parents can be directly involved in shaping their children’s future. This is how we can hold our school district accountable! Let’s give a huge round of applause for all of the parents who organized to make it happen!

Finally, formerly-incarcerated people are fed up with the status quo for rehabilitation. Every year Los Angeles County invests $900 million in the Probation Department, but community members and the LA County Board of Supervisors are not satisfied with the results of these investments. Now is the right time for community to participate in creating a new vision and alternatives for probation through the Probation Reform Implementation Team. Show some love for our Long Beach community members ensuring we are represented on the countywide team!

It’s clear that for too long we’ve been told by people in power that, when it comes to our priorities, resources are scarce. The people know that is not true and that we have moved from a scarcity mentality to a bountiful mentality. We can have good health, wellness, and prosperity for all people, not just for a select few.

The inequities and trauma our communities face are systemic and while investing money to change it is a start, ultimately, we need to look very differently at our cities priorities and at how we are transforming our community and society.

Don’t believe me? For instance, let’s talk about the Long Beach Police Department. You didn’t think we could have a People’s State of the City without talking about the Long Beach Police Department did you?

The City of Long Beach allocates forty-four percent of the general fund budget into the police department alone. To put this in perspective: our parks department gets seven percent, the libraries get three percent, and the health department gets ONE percent. Meanwhile, city officials try to sweep the police department’s liabilities under the rug by paying out tens of millions of dollars to impacted families and MORE money to public relations firms to improve their image.

Just a month ago, the City was ordered to pay $9.8 million to the family of Sinuon Pream, who was killed by police officers on 7th and Bellflower in 2017. This was the largest payout for police murder in our city’s recent history. Then in September, Thomas Gonzalez was awarded $736,000 by the courts because Thomas called out the corruption between the Citizens Police Complaint Commission, the police department and the city. Do you think we need to change this system?

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17 Los Angeles County Probation Department website, https://probation.lacounty.gov/about-probation/
18 City of Long Beach Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Analysis, Advancement Project California
19 Family of woman shot, killed by Long Beach police receives $9.8 million jury verdict, Long Beach Press-Telegram
20 Jury Decision Validates City Hall Corruption, Beachcomber
Also in September, national news outlet Al Jazeera published an investigative report detailing how current and former lieutenants from the Long Beach Police Department have been instructing officers to use a self-deleting messaging app called Tiger Text to share sensitive and potentially incriminating information about officer-involved shootings that they would not want to be disclosed in court. The Tiger Text app is designed to erase text messages within a set short time. Once the messages have been erased, they cannot be recovered.

Remember how the Police Department got forty-four percent of the general fund budget this year? Now you know where the money’s going! On top of that, of the officers who instructed others to use TigerText, some of them now make up department leadership, in high-ranking positions. Recall, this is also the same department that fought tirelessly against the community’s proposed version of a Sanctuary City policy to end police collaboration with ICE. That’s them.

And I am not done. Over the last 5 years, the Long Beach Police Department had the third highest rate of police killings in California based on our city’s population, only behind to Bakersfield and Stockton. That’s even higher than the Los Angeles Police Department! Even more disheartening is that it is young people of color who are being the most targeted, where LBPD is using technology like LASER and Palantir to predict “future crime.” Our young Black and Brown men are over incarcerated and shot by the police at higher rates than the national average.

Behind all of these numbers are the lives that have been stolen. We know the stories of our neighbors and entire community being targeted by this police system because of your skin color or because of your gender identity or sexuality. These tactics are overwhelmingly traumatizing our Black and Brown family members who are just walking down the street with a cell phone in hand, trying to catch the Blue Line, walking with a shopping cart, or just or trying to survive another day.


What I am saying is that all of this isn’t just one “isolated incident.” None of this is happening as “a mistake.” This is what “systemic” means and what happens when we don’t address, acknowledge, or disrupt the systemic racism that exists within our own institutions and government. Frankly, it’s corruption from the Police Department to the City Manager’s office, who has allowed all of these things to happen and go unaddressed.

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21 US police 'using Tiger Text app to conceal evidence', Al Jazeera
22 Mapping Police Violence: mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities
23 How Palantir, Peter Thiel’s Secretive Data Company Pushed Into Policing
So if we want to change this, putting more money into the police department isn’t going to fix these legacies. That is why the community is coming together to disrupt these patterns of injustice and call for real accountability. That means abolishing the current police structure as we know it and transforming our society into one that heals people and prioritizes the whole community instead of targeting and inciting fear amongst others.

Don’t you want to live in a world where we are not afraid to walk down the block? Where people don’t have to live on the street because their basic needs like housing, healthcare, and food are being met? Where everyone can authentically be themselves without fear of being targeted or killed?

This world is possible, but we have to do the work: Get uncomfortable, organize with your friends and neighbors, and take some risks to make it happen!

We have to move away from our reliance on harmful systems like the police-state and embrace housing as a human right, embrace mental health and wellness support for our families, and embrace that everyone has worth and value, regardless of their background. We can invest in community psychologists, reinvest in school counselors and nurses INSTEAD of police being the first responders to our mental health and educational needs. We can fund our people, not police!

This world is possible, and I hope you will join us over the coming months as myself and several others in the community announce the next chapter of organizing to abolish these harmful and punitive structures and transform Long Beach for the better.

Together, we can tear down barriers like anti-blackness and discrimination, free our people, heal our communities, and create a world in which we want to live! “It is our duty to fight for our freedom! It is our duty to win!”

Cynthia

We got some big challenges ahead, but there are real opportunities to make change. And even though we have to fight and struggle, we will heal and thrive just as we always have.

There’s no example better than the 2020 census. By this time next year, it will be our job to ensure all our people are counted so we can get the representation and resources we need and deserve. And that doesn’t mean it will be easy.

Dawn

With the census being online and the federal government using fear to target undocumented people, the divide between the haves and have nots in our city will be felt. This is not JUST a digital divide when it comes to who has access to the internet, this is a racial digital divide—and the sooner we acknowledge that, the sooner we can work towards real solutions. Only 6 out of
10 households in the city making less than $20,000 a year have internet access, and we already know that an overwhelming majority of the people in poverty are Black and Brown families.24

**Cynthia**

If we work together, we will change the numbers. People are already doing this. Last November, residents came together at the people’s voter forum to educate and empower others about the opportunities for health and justice at the ballot box. November also brought a whole new wave of Cambodian residents getting involved in civic engagement to help ensure Cambodian representation in government.

**Dawn**

Getting involved in elections—whether as a voter for progressive issues or to educate and encourage others to vote—is an important step, but it’s not the last step. If we want to build the future we know is possible, we need to organize our communities for the long-haul. That’s why 28 community members participated in last year’s Long Beach Rising Leadership Training to learn and practice organizing skills for community change.

**Cynthia**

Learning how to have one-on-one conversations with people, or how to analyze power and figure out ways to disrupt that is not easy, but there is a network of people dedicated to teaching others how we can win—regardless of our age, race, abilities, or gender identity. If you’re fired up and ready to rise up to the challenge, we encourage you to apply to the Long Beach Rising Leadership Training happening this fall!

**Dawn**

The challenges we face are systemic and penetrate nearly every corner of our lives, which is why sustaining our efforts and healing our communities are so necessary to seeing our vision become a reality. A reality where the color of our skin, the amount of money we make, or the neighborhood that we live in doesn’t determine our future opportunities. That’s a Long Beach we all want to call home.

**Noah**

Y’all. Now is the moment we have been waiting for. The reality is that 2020 is now and this is the moment for us to transform our communities. To do that, it starts with us and connecting with others. We can’t build community unless we connect with each other and build those relationships. We must appreciate each other, honor each other, and love and support one another. Let me hear you if you’re ready to get to work!

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24 PolicyLink Equitable Growth Profile of the City of Long Beach - Economic Vitality, February 2019