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CONTACT: Kate Montanez, kmontane@usc.edu

**STATEMENT ON INSTALLING PERMANENT PUBLIC DRINKING WATER
FOUNTAINS IN LOS ANGELES**

Access to clean water is a basic human right that should never be violated.

Water insecurity is a serious problem for people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, where the city has systematically removed access under blatant anti-homelessness efforts. These government efforts are intended to both discourage and criminalize homelessness on the false premise that people experiencing homelessness had a choice in the matter.

Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti and our other elected officials have neglected our unhoused neighbors and failed to protect the basic human rights of thousands of vulnerable Angelenos by prioritizing institutions, like LAPD, over basic human needs. This failure to establish permanent, safe access to drinking water in Skid Row and other permanent unhoused communities in the Greater Los Angeles Area illuminates how the system continues to actively deny people of their human rights, stagnate tangible action on curtailing/preventing homelessness, and support oppressive capitalist institutions--instead of protecting its people.

According to The Los Angeles Times, as of June 4th, 2019, homelessness in the city of Los Angeles had soared to 36,000 people. County-wide homelessness had increased by 12% from the previous year, totaling 58,936 people (Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority). Nonprofit organization Share A Meal recently reported that in 2020, 66,436 people are experiencing homelessness across Los Angeles, another 12% increase from the previous year.

Also in 2019, over 4,700 people experiencing homelessness resided in Skid Row alone, and in a 2018 LA-based study, stories revealed that nearly 60% of those experiencing homelessness had difficulty regularly accessing clean water. People should not have to tap fire hydrants just to access water, and the frequent modification of fire hydrants throughout Skid Row exemplifies residents' critical need for clean water access. The second largest city in the nation demands more than a Mayor who remains behind the scenes instead of making a sustained and ardent effort to help the very civilians he took an oath not to harm.



Structural and institutional racism are at the core of Los Angeles' housing crisis. Black Angelenos are highly overrepresented in the city's homeless population: Black Angelenos represent 7.9% of LA County's general population, while they represent 33.8% of LA County's population of people experiencing homelessness. It is crucial to note that all other races, aside from Native Americans, are proportionately represented. This is a direct result of historical systemic racism due to redlining, mass incarceration, employment discrimination, inaccessible healthcare, and other variable factors. Skid Row, specifically, has a history of being treated as a dumping ground for hospitals, prisons, and other cities to get rid of people that have nowhere else to go.

Discriminatory redlining practices from the 1940s-1960s effectively consolidated LA County's Black population into just two dozen neighborhoods in South LA and ultimately ignited housing instability for Black Angelenos. This is exemplified in the subsequent and interlinked chain of unjust events that further entrenched systematic oppression: denial of home loans led to cycles of disinvestment in Black communities, decline in manufacturing jobs compounded poverty and doubled Black unemployment, the War on Drugs permeated communities, and the rise of cost of living pushed Black residents out of South LA.

Homelessness is a product of institutionalized racism, and persistent anti-homelessness efforts from the local government further criminalize poverty. Instead of meeting community needs and addressing the water access gap in marginalized communities, local officials continue to neglect basic human rights. Guided by Black leadership in the Black Lives Matter movement we push to defund and to dismantle violent systems. We envision a future that supports and uplifts self-determined communities.

It is our duty as human beings to consider the health, comfort, and wellness of our neighbors in our communities. Unhoused folx are a vulnerable group that is most likely to be impacted by heat illnesses due to water insecurity, especially in Los Angeles, where the hottest months of the year can reach dangerously high temperatures surpassing 100 degrees.

In favorable conditions, the CDC recommends you drink half a gallon per day. But when temperatures in LA are surging, the CDC recommends that each person drink up to 1 gallon PER DAY. That same recommendation of 1 gallon per day applies for a person experiencing variable health conditions, pregnancy, or illness. High temperatures mean a higher chance of heatstroke, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses that have extremely serious, life-threatening effects for many people living without water access on Skid Row and in other permanent unhoused communities. This is particularly true for elderly folx and people with pre-existing health conditions. Permanent public drinking water fountains must be installed YEAR-ROUND because there is a tremendous amount of people who are severely dehydrated and undernourished in the unhoused communities of LA.



A lack of access to clean water also leads to a lack of access to sanitation, leading to poor hygiene amongst folx experiencing homelessness. One person's 3-day supply of water should be 3 gallons — 1 gallon per day with ½ gallon for drinking, and ½ gallon for cooking and personal sanitation. By removing access to clean water and thereby sanitation for consistent, basic hygiene, the city ostracizes unhoused folx, continues to foster the promotion of exclusionary policies, and fails to prioritize human dignity.

Again, water access is a basic human right, and it is of the absolutely utmost importance during the COVID-19 global pandemic. People experiencing homelessness are at especially high risk of COVID spread, also because so many are older adults or have underlying medical conditions. Water fountains placed throughout Skid Row and other permanent unhoused communities will allow greater accessibility for all residents of the area, making a huge difference, especially for individuals that have disabilities or other health conditions. It will also greatly improve situations for individuals that are COVID-positive and need a close access point for water while they are quarantining in their tents and trying to minimize contact with other individuals. In a city as wealthy as Los Angeles, there should never be uncertainty about where people should go for water or hesitation about how far they'll have to walk while carrying said water--especially during a pandemic.

Mayor Garcetti and the city of LA have done nothing to provide permanent access to clean drinking water during this unequivocally uncertain and life-threatening time. Their failure to establish permanent water infrastructure is a blatant violation of human rights and a paradigm of gross negligence. In previous years, in anticipation of summer heat waves, LADWP has installed temporary drinking fountains that attach to fire hydrants in Skid Row and across LA county.

However, this June, three months into the pandemic, LADWP removed the temporary drinking fountains at the request of the Mayor's office because they felt that the fountains "weren't worth the risk" of potential COVID transmission. Upon contacting city officials in August, they stated alternative water sources would not be established and that "LADWP does not intend to install additional temporary drinking fountains."

The city has failed to establish accessible water source alternatives necessary to protect the lives of the unhoused folx in our communities. They reported to us in email correspondence that they are "looking to install permanent hydration stations" (as they've stated for years), but have yet to make this a reality, severely lacking the urgency needed to adequately address how the City has denied thousands of unhoused Angelenos access to clean water during the hottest months of the year and a global pandemic.



The COVID concerns and health risks for contact with both temporary and permanent water fountains are valid; and must be met with comprehensive/exhaustive safety measures and resources to ensure the safety and health of the communities that depend on them as their only source of water. It is imperative that people are acutely alert to the risks of infection and take precautions to limit the spread of COVID and look out for the health and wellbeing of themselves and others.

Mayor Garcetti and the city of LA have failed to acknowledge that COVID and water insecurity are interconnected public health issues. It is absolutely senseless that our officials consistently treat vulnerable groups, such as unhoused folx, with dramatically reduced priority when it comes to meeting their basic needs and protecting them during a global pandemic.

We demand that permanent water infrastructure be established to meet the basic needs of our neighbors, who deserve the right to dignified access to clean water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene purposes. We demand that Mayor Garcetti and the city of LA work with community-based organizations and experts to lay the framework for the implementation of this project to be the most wide-reaching and holistically impactful. They must work in conjunction with sustainable and sanitary solutions that will ensure the good health and safety of the members of Skid Row and other unhoused communities around LA.

By establishing permanent and universal access to water and developing/guaranteeing consistent and proper sanitation protocol regarding the water fountains, we take a step in the right direction toward systemic change and restoring dignity to our neighbors by ensuring their rights to clean water are never compromised again.

The only way to truly and sustainably protect people — especially during LA heat waves, but every day as well — is to establish permanent, widely accessible, public drinking water fountains.



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