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Community Leaders Organize to Bring Green Jobs to the Inner City

Citywide program launches to create jobs for disadvantaged workers and revitalize inner city communities

Los Angeles, CA—The City of Los Angeles today unveiled the first building retrofit completed through its landmark Green Retrofit and Workforce Program. Unanimously approved by the Los Angeles City Council in 2009, the program will retrofit hundreds of city buildings and establish a training program creating career paths to good, green, safe jobs targeting workers in low-income communities. The pilot phase of the program will retrofit 15 buildings throughout the City, including the Vineyard Recreation Center unveiled today in South Los Angeles.

The Green Retrofit and Workforce Program is the result of a multi-year campaign led by SCOPE and the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance, a partnership of 25 community-based organizations, environmental groups and labor unions. The first-in-the-nation program will reduce energy use and pollution, create jobs to help revitalize the local economy, and target employment opportunities to communities hit hardest by the economic downturn.

As high levels of poverty and unemployment persist, the economic divide continues to widen in Los Angeles. Inner city communities are in crisis, a result of chronic unemployment, underemployment and a high concentration of low-wage jobs. Unemployment in communities such as South Los Angeles hovers around 30 percent—far exceeding the overall County unemployment rate of 13 percent. Among those who are employed, one-third of workers do not earn enough to provide for the basic needs of their families.

Workers of color have borne the brunt of the recession. The unemployment rate for black workers throughout Los Angeles is around 20 percent and nearly 30 percent of black workers are in dead-end jobs earning \$12 per hour or less. Latinos face similarly high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

Community leaders are at the forefront of the fight for solutions to the economic crisis. “I have lived in South Los Angeles for most of my life and seen all the good-paying jobs leave my neighborhood. I want good jobs and public investment brought back to inner city communities like mine,” said Virginia Franklin, a longtime SCOPE Community Leader, and union member with SEIU United Long Term Care Workers, who knocked on doors in her neighborhood to build support for the Green Retrofit program.

Many community members share this sentiment. Last year, SCOPE surveyed over 11,000 South Los Angeles voters to learn their views on public investment. An overwhelming majority (79 percent) said that the City of Los Angeles should invest public dollars in large projects to create jobs for the community.

Thanks to the leadership of strong community leaders such as Virginia Franklin, along with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Councilmember Herb Wesson, the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program models exactly this type of public investment by providing disadvantaged workers and their families with a path out of poverty. “With the support of the City Council, we are investing in a local economic stimulus program that addresses the challenges of long term poverty and pollution through a comprehensive program that trains and puts Angelenos to work greening city buildings,” said Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. “The success of the city’s Green Retrofit and Workforce Program is going to provide good jobs in low-income communities while facilitating the growth of the green economy,” said Councilmember Herb Wesson. “I’m proud that Los Angeles is the first city in the nation to develop this innovative program, and that we will be setting an example for other cities to follow our lead.”

Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) is a community-based organization building grassroots power to eliminate the structural barriers to social and economic opportunities for poor and disenfranchised communities.

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