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February 22, 2016

The Honorable Julian Castro
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Castro:

It has been exciting to see the strong commitment displayed by every member of the coalition assembled in the enclosed application for Round 3 of the HUD Promise Zone program. This application addresses needs that cross two Congressional Districts. I am proud to have worked closely with my colleague, Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard and Los Angeles Trade Technical College (LATTC) president, Larry Frank, to bring together not only members of the affected communities, service providers and business associations, but also elected and appointed leadership at every level of government, all of whom stand ready to bring their best efforts to this unprecedented partnership to benefit South Los Angeles.

The South Los Angeles Transit Empowerment Zone (SLATE-Z) encompasses an area with one of the highest concentrations of urban poverty in the nation: 45.48% (compared with 17.8% for L.A. County as a whole). Those poverty numbers apply even with the area's 88% employment rate, due to under-employment, poor quality jobs, lack of mobility, and poor educational opportunities. Only 48% of residents have a high school education or higher.

Yet the SLATE-Z area has begun to receive significant investment of state, county and city resources into transit corridors, with some planning and construction already underway. This proposal aims to use a Promise Zone designation to leverage those new and planned investments in order to tackle some of the persistent problems of poverty in the SLATE-Z boundaries. It expects to do this using three interlocking approaches: Economic Revitalization (jobs and entrepreneurship tied to current and planned construction and other opportunities); Education and Career Pathways (engaging both Pre-K through 12th grade and youth/adult training and support); and Community Revitalization (crime reduction and prevention, plus health promotion). And diverse group of government officials, top educators, nonprofit leaders and business executives—all decision makers with the ability to take action—have played active roles in developing this proposal and are pledged to use their best efforts in accomplishing its goals.

Mr. Secretary, I want to emphasize that having a second Promise Zone designation in Los Angeles is completely appropriate because of the city's size, diversity and level of poverty. With approximately 3.8 million residents, the city of Los Angeles has a population larger than nearly half the states in our country. There is also precedent for the federal government taking into account that Los Angeles and other large cities should not be disadvantaged in situations like this one. For example, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention within the Department of Health and Human Services included South Los Angeles in its first round of funding in the 1990s, and Los Angeles received multiple follow-up grants in subsequent years. The federal government understood that fully investing in Los Angeles benefits the entire nation.

I urge the Department of Housing and Urban Development to give this application full and fair consideration and, should SLATE-Z receive federal designation as a Promise Zone, I am committed to working with this coalition to realize the promise included in these proposals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Bass". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Karen Bass

Member of Congress

37th Congressional District of California