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March 18, 2025

Mayor Karen Bass
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mayor Bass,

On Saturday, February 15, 2025 the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) hosted a listening session at the Autry Museum of the West for American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) community members. The purpose of the listening session was for community members to share how they have been impacted by the Eaton and Palisades fires as well as questions and concerns they have about the new Federal administration. 19 community members participated. Participants were broken out into 3 small groups and participated in small group discussions facilitated by LANAIC Commissioners. The following 3 questions were discussed:

1. How are you impacted by the wildfires?
2. What are your concerns about the federal executive orders and policy changes?
3. What support do you need?

Attached to this letter are the notes from the listening session. The LANAIC will be submitting a follow-up letter to your office in April with recommendations to address the concerns shared by the AIAN community at the listening session.

Sincerely,

Shawn Imitates Dog, Chairperson
Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission

ALEXANDRA VALDES
Executive Director

Attachment: February 15, 2025 LANAIC Community Listening Session Notes



February 15, 2025 Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission Community Listening Session Notes

1. How are you impacted by the wildfires?

Listening session participants identified numerous impacts from the fires that were either experienced personally or by the AIAN community. They have been sorted into the below categories and summarized. Related questions are included in the relevant section.

Cultural Impacts

The traditional homelands of local tribes were destroyed by the fires. Participants expressed concern that there was little to no mention from the mainstream media or on social media regarding this enormous loss. Access to sacred space and land for AIAN people in LA County was limited before the fires. The fires have created even greater access issues as well as destroyed traditional medicines. Participants shared that due to a lack of federal acknowledgment local tribes will feel the hardships created by the fires even greater.

Members of a local tribe expressed disappointment that people living on their ancestral homeland land lack the basic knowledge they learned from their ancestors about traditional land management and cultural burning practices. Some participants asserted the fires would not have occurred if AIAN people had continued to steward the land. The importance of listening to AIAN leaders in the rebuilding process was emphasized.

Some participants shared that the fires present an opportunity to reset the status quo of land management in California and learn from Indigenous Peoples and to bring back traditional ways of protecting land and water including controlled burns. It was emphasized that fire is sacred and reacts either humbly or destructively depending on how it is fueled.

Participants expressed that it is critical that LA County and LA City work with tribes to be proactive in how we prepare for the next fire.

Question(s): Can LA County and LA City partner with local tribes to conduct cultural burns?

Environmental & Wildlife Impacts:

Participants shared that the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is in jeopardy and may be ignored in the rush to rebuild Altadena and Pacific Palisades. Participants cautioned the Board of Supervisors and State of California on relaxing policies and restrictions regarding the rebuild.

Participants shared being impacted by the toxic air during and after the fires and noted that the fires could have lasting impacts on water quality and land in the future. It was shared that the ways in which this cleanup and rebuild happens may set new precedence for how to address future fires and that it is critical that AIAN people share their point of view with elected officials to protect Mother Earth including animal and plant life.

Question(s): Where is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moving and storing debris from properties? Will it be shipped off to other communities or cities? Are materials hazardous or biodegradable? How does it impact Mother Earth? What is the long-term effect? How has the soil been impacted?

Physical, Mental & Emotional Health Impacts

Participants expressed physical impacts from the fires due to preexisting conditions including asthma. Concern for the health and wellbeing of incarcerated firefighters as well as inmates at the facility near the Hughes Fire was also shared. Participants discussed the emotional impact when hearing AIAN family and friends share their thoughts about the devastation, loss of lives and homes and seeing people fleeing from the fires. People never expected this to happen in an urban area and this resulted in a sense of feeling vulnerable. Additionally, participants expressed that the experience felt apocalyptic, heartbreaking and traumatic.

Economic & Social Impacts

Participants shared that they knew families that lost everything, and that the AIAN community had been impacted through direct property loss and job loss. Participants shared of opening their homes to individuals from the impacted areas. Participants also expressed serious concern about the displacement of black families and the possible loss of homeownership in Altadena.

Participants shared about the how the fires disrupted much of daily life in Los Angeles County, with everything from how people traveled through the County to and from work to Youth sports leagues were and continue to be deeply affected by the fires.

Question: Is the California Coastal Commission going to allow homes to be rebuilt along Pacific Coast Highway?

2. What are your concerns about the federal executive orders and policy changes?

Listening session participants identified numerous concerns resultant of recent actions by the Trump administration. They have been sorted into the below categories and summarized. In addition to the concerns noted below, participants also expressed feeling scared of the effects President Trump's actions can have in the short term including job loss and being able to afford basic needs as well in the long term. Additionally, participants expressed the President's desire to stoke fear and the importance to resist and remain unafraid and to not project fear onto other community members.

Impacts of the Federal Funding Freeze

A primary concern expressed by participants was the vast and varied impacts that the federal funding freeze could have on the following, including funding tribes depend on and are legally entitled to:

- Medicare and Medicaid
- Social Security
- Bureau Indian of Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education
- Indian Health Service Office of Urban Indian Health Programs
- Substance abuse services, suicide prevention services, and opioid prevention service.

- CalFresh
- Section 8
- Community Services Block Grant Native American Set-aside funds administered by LA County and the LANAIC
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Department of Energy – Climate Change Office
- US Forest Service
- Federal funding that is administered by LA County AIAN serving CBOs

Dismantling of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Efforts

Participants expressed fear and concern about President Trump’s anti-DEI policies and how it will impact opportunities for AIAN including career growth, accessing college education, and military promotional fairness as well as the increased need to be vigilant as White supremacy is a safety concern for the AIAN community. Participants also noted possible impacts Trump’s anti-DEI policy can have on federal AIAN prisoners who have had access to prayers, ceremony and sweats.

Participants expressed fear that the Los Angeles AIAN artist community will not be able to have cultural arts exhibits and theater projects during Native American Heritage Month and Indigenous Peoples’ Day. A participant shared that under President Trump the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) rearranged to support only US racist propaganda.

Immigration & ICE

Many participants noted ICE as very scary with one participant noting that ICE was the scariest threat now. Participants shared the fear of raids in businesses, schools, and doctors and the rains in detainments of AIAN individuals. Additionally, a participant shared that profiling of AIANs has increased by local law enforcement and that AIAN kids are scared to walk to school in fear that they will be picked up by ICE. It was shared that ICE posters are in West Hollywood and that ICE is expected to knock on doors in LA on February 28, 2025.

Participants shared about the importance of carrying tribal identification cards considering the possible need to explain their citizenship to ICE. They discussed how many community members do not have tribal IDs or Certificate of Indian Blood and need assistance securing these critical documents.

LGBTQ+ Rights

Participants expressed deep concern and contempt for the Trump administration’s attempted erasure of transpeople as well as how actions will negatively impact LA County’s two-spirit community’s safety and ability to celebrate Indigenous Pride in Los Angeles this year. A participant also shared that the two-spirit community are not trans, and it is important to not use the language of the colonizer and that two-spirit folks have been here since the beginning of time.

Education

Participants expressed concern about the possible shuttering of the Department of Education and how that will impact AIAN children. Participants also shared that employees at LAUSD are worried about losing their jobs. It was shared that the uncertainty and chaos created by resultant of Trump’s actions are making people question going to college at this time.

Tribal Issues

Participants expressed concern that tribal sovereignty is under attack by the Trump administration and shared disappointment with their tribal leaders because a lack of communication.

Erosion of Democracy, Rise in Misinformation & Disappointment in Political Parties

Participants expressed fear of the judicial system being dismantled by the Trump administration. Participants also shared concern with prevalent misinformation and having trouble determining what is truth these days.

Participants expressed disappointment in both political parties for having no plans to provide support to AIAN community and disappointment with Democrats for being weak and having no plan.

3. What support do you need?

Listening session participants identified several supports needed currently.

- Leadership from the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) to uplift needs and perspectives of the AIAN community.
- A community statement, possibly drafted by the LANAIC, that articulates a cohesive message recognizing what is happening regarding the new Federal administration and what the AIAN community is doing about it.
- A community statement open to resist President Trump's anti-immigrant policy.
- Support and protection for local non-federally recognized tribes.
- Resources and support for the AIAN LGBTQ2S+ community.
- Support for spiritual well-being and healing including increased access to local land and space to use for ceremonies and traditional gatherings including quarterly prayer circles.
- Better use of land use for Native American local tribes for use for ceremonies and traditional learning centers for cultural and language preservation.
- The establishment of a liaison or office connected to tribes throughout the country, other key urban AIAN areas and national AIAN organizations including Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), and the National Indian Education Association (NIEA).
- A central repository (ex. social media platforms) of AIAN events, activities, and service and resources, including for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in LA County, so all AIAN stakeholders can have access and be informed.
- Identified evacuation sites for AIAN community for future emergencies, emergency transportation resources for AIAN community members who do not have vehicles and a point of contact for AIAN community to support families and provide resources in times of emergency.
- An understanding of LA County and LA City's visions for the rebuilds of Altadena and Pacific Palisades. Are considerations being made regarding what materials to rebuild with? Are they ecologically and environmentally friendly? Are locations being reevaluated regarding the potential for future fires?
- Resources to develop a Native workforce to assist with the rebuilds of Altadena and Pacific Palisades and to advocate for embedding pre-colonization design including floodplains.
- City/County departments/services need to unify and communicate better for emergencies and improve the problematic County notification system.

- Commitment from LA City and LA County to consult with tribal governments in the fire rebuilds in Altadena and Pacific Palisades.
- An established and trusted link to the LA County Sheriff's Department and local police departments for Feather Alerts
- Schools/kids don't have enough counselors to help kids with what they are feeling.
- How do we start planning now at a grassroots level for the next administration. Civic engagement is important.
- Assistance for AIAN individuals obtaining tribal IDs and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB).

Additional Information

In addition to responses to the above questions, a few other major themes arose during the discussions including the collective strength and resiliency of the AIAN community and the need for the community to stay unified, work in collaboration and continue to fight for justice for the community and tribes. A sense of deep pride and gratitude for the firefighters that came to fight the fires from numerous tribal nations was shared. A need to shift from being reactionary as a community to proactive and forward thinking was also named. Participants shared the importance of AIAN community members using their voices and unique perspectives including most importantly AIAN elders. Participants discussed feeling that the AIAN community is always last to be supported as well as that community members have a hard time asking for assistance. Finally, it was shared that that the reality that Palestinians are facing could happen to AIAN communities in the United States.