

PRESS RELEASE

NOT FOR RELEASE UNTIL 9:00 AM ON MARCH 11

LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK SUES LAPD AND CENTRAL CITY EAST ASSOCIATION FOR CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND MALICIOUS PROSECUTION

LOS ANGELES, CA (March 10, 2014)-- Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) and staff organizer Deborah Burton will hold a **9:00 A.M. press conference at LAPD headquarters on Tuesday, March 11, 2014** to announce a lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), Central City East Association (CCEA), Downtown Industrial District Business Improvement District, LAPD Chief Charlie Beck, LAPD Lieutenant Shannon Paulson, and former CCEA Executive Director Estela Lopez. for violations of First Amendment and other civil rights, as well as for malicious prosecution on behalf of Ms. Burton. They are represented by the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Hadsell, Stormer, Richardson & Renick, LLP, and Law Office of John L. Raphling.

LA CAN and Burton are bringing this lawsuit because of the defendants' outrageous and illegal conduct in targeting LA CAN, its staff, and its members for harassment by continually violating their civil rights in an attempt to silence them and to shut them down. Defendants have conspired to harass, intimidate, arrest, and wrongfully prosecute LA CAN, in order to eliminate community opposition to the Safer Cities Initiative and other law enforcement policies that fuel gentrification. Defendants' actions are intended to frustrate LA CAN's mission by interfering with their ability to organize and empower the majority African-American Skid Row community. The malicious prosecution and conspiracy against plaintiff Deborah Burton was the culmination of defendants' efforts to silence LA CAN and criminalize protected First Amendment activity.

Beginning in 2011 LA CAN and supporters began protesting the CCEA's monthly Skid Row Walks, which promoted CCEA's anti-homeless agenda. On a few occasions, including in June 2011, protesters used noisemakers including toy air horns. Over one year later, the City Attorney filed criminal charges against Deborah Burton. Plaintiffs uncovered a series of emails between LAPD and the CCEA which show a concerted effort by all defendants to target LA CAN, resulting in the contrived prosecution of Ms. Burton despite overwhelming evidence of her innocence. Last summer a jury acquitted Ms. Burton of seven counts of assault and battery for allegedly sounding a toy air horn directly in the ear of then CCEA director Estela Lopez at the June, 2011 lawful protest. After the trial, jury members stated that they found Lopez and police officer testimony to be lacking in credibility.

"I was unfairly targeted because I am a community organizer with LA CAN. My freedom was threatened just because we are calling out injustices and demanding better for our community. Despite the fear and intimidation tactics, I remain committed to improving my community and organizing other residents to exercise our First Amendment rights and protect the civil rights of all," said Deborah Burton, LA CAN Organizer and long-time Skid Row resident.

There have been numerous incidents of harassment, detention, and arrest of LA CAN members by LAPD since LA CAN's opposition to the Safer City Initiative, including mass deployment of officers at LA CAN events, tasing an LA CAN member in City Hall, and infringing on First Amendment rights by threatening arrest for protected activity such as chanting.

"It's outrageous that the police and a business association would conspire against a homeless advocacy non-profit and its staff. Instead of focusing on its mission, LA CAN has been forced to use its limited resources

fighting this unlawful targeting. The defendants should be helping the fight against homelessness, not wasting public resources prosecuting first amendment protected activity,” said Barbara Schultz, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles attorney for plaintiffs.

The lawsuit seeks to stop defendants’ criminalization of constitutionally protected activity and targeting of LA CAN and other community based organizations.

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Spanish Speakers available