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Council To Take Up Debate Over Poverty, Blight, Lack Of Investment In LAX Tourism Industry

Community Leaders, Hotel Workers, Business Experts to Testify At Hearing That Could Lead to Policy for Revitalizing Gateway to L.A.

The City Council's Commerce and Tourism Committee will hold its first hearing on the future of Century Boulevard and the LAX tourism industry. The hearing comes in response to a motion from City Councilmember Bill Rosendahl, who has asked the city to consider possible investment to improve conditions in the Century Corridor.

The Council hearing also follows the delivery of thousands of petitions by the Coalition for a New Century calling on city leaders to address conditions for workers, communities and the hotel industry near LAX. The Coalition, which includes religious leaders, educators, workers, labor unions and residents, wants the Council to consider a comprehensive public policy solution to the problems of poverty, crime, blight and lack of investment in the area, which is critical to the city's economy.

"Every day we see families who cannot pay the rent, who cannot put food on the table, who cannot take their kids to the doctor," said Rev. Altagracia Perez of Holy Faith Episcopal Church in Inglewood. "We know that the high crime rates and overcrowding in our community are linked to the poverty-wage jobs of the hotel industry. We believe that these jobs are vital to our community and to the economy of the city. But it's time for us to work together to make these good jobs so that we can finally begin to lift our community out of poverty and into the middle class."

A report (www.newcenturycoalition.org) released last month by the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy finds that Century Boulevard hotel workers earn far less than their counterparts in the rest of L.A. County, and that the nearby communities of Lennox, Inglewood and Hawthorne, where a large number of these workers live, suffer high rates of poverty, crime and overcrowding. One in four residents in these communities lives below the federal poverty line, a measure of extreme poverty, while more than 40% of children come from poor households. Median household income is 25% lower than in L.A. County as a whole. The report also finds that the City of Los Angeles has invested less in the tourism industry as a proportion of total economic output than have other comparable cities, despite the fact that tourism ranks as the region's fourth-largest industry.

Last week, a blue ribbon commission headed by former Los Angeles City Councilmember Ruth Galanter and Rev. Cecil Murray heard powerful testimony from workers, community leaders, economic experts and educators on conditions near LAX and the Century Corridor. An audience of more than 200 residents, workers and civic leaders filled Westchester Christian Church, where they listened to witnesses describe the economic blight on Century Boulevard, the area's unrealized potential as a source of tourism revenue and the impacts of poverty on families and communities.

The commission – whose other members include Los Angeles Community College Trustee Warren Furutani, Susana Reyes of the Sierra Club and the League of Conservation Voters, and Professor Ninez Ponce of the UCLA School of Public Health – is expected to issue a report in April.

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