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Press Release

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Safety and Security for Sale, but for Whom? LA Community Action Network Heads toward the Eye of the Storm to Defend against Gentrification

The Los Angeles Community Action Network is saying “enough is enough!” already and is preparing to take direct action to end fast-growing patterns of abuse perpetuated against poor and homeless residents by downtown BID security guards. **On Friday November 4th at 11:00 a.m., LA CAN will launch CommunityWatch at the doorsteps of the Downtown Center Business Improvement District, led by President and CEO Carol Schatz, located at 8th and Hill Streets.** CommunityWatch is an initiative to provide an alternative private security presence in the downtown community – one trained to ensure that civil rights violations by BID security guards and others are stopped.

“It is illegal for private citizens to act like police officers and for the police to embrace them and or simply turn a blind-eye. All residents have the same rights as the BID security guards and LA CAN members are organized and prepared to exercise those rights.” ---Steve Richardson, CommunityWatch leader

Over the past five years, LA CAN has taken many courses of action which, in most other communities, would have led to **reasonable** outcomes. However, the violations against predominately Black, low-income residents continue at an unprecedented pace. With little progress to date, we have concluded that unless we **arm community residents** with the tools need to **defend** themselves, we will be continue to be rendered helpless against illicit behavior utilized by downtown security guards. LA CAN is also questioning the use of private citizens to conduct state action, an activity which is illegal under state and federal law.

Downtown Business Improvement District security guards have a long, yet not so illustrious, history of dealing with residents of “skid row.” The incidence of abuse, illegal use of “private citizen” power, court settlements to bring an end to illicit behaviors, and the imprisonment of guards date back over five years. All of this activity served as little more than a blip on most radar screens and as a city should ask ourselves the question, why?

In August 2005, amidst an upswing of community complaints of aggressive illegal behavior on the part of the BID security guards, LA CAN sent an urgent “SOS” letter to local, state and national elected officials. The list included Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Councilmember Jan Perry, State

Senator Gil Cedillo, State Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, U.S. Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard and the Los Angeles Police Commission. We have yet to hear from the majority of these elected officials regarding their position and/or willingness to stop the abuses against minorities, African Americans in particular.

LA CAN has been engaged in attempting to ameliorate the relationships between downtown Business Improvement District security guards and poor residents through a variety of methods. From surveys and reports to the creation of court-approved "sensitivity trainings" geared towards acclimating guards to the realities of our community; LA CAN has steadfastly continued to search for **reasonable** answers. Most recently, in September 2005, the Office of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the only elected official to respond to our SOS, convened a meeting between the Human Relations Commission of Los Angeles and LA CAN. The outcome of that meeting is still in limbo however the incidence of violence continues but LA CAN is still awaiting **reasonable** outcomes. At the same time, CommunityWatch will serve as the necessary check and balance against abuses by security guards.

"While LA CAN continues to work with other parties to end this unacceptable behavior, we also believe we have the capacity and authority to end this behavior through our own resources. We have 10 trained community members ready to launch CommunityWatch and intervene against human and civil