



# MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCILMEMBER | DISTRICT 10

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **A Movement For a Better Tomorrow: 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Empowerment Congress Summit**

Amid a year that's been unprecedented in so many ways, including last week's attack on the United States Capitol, Councilmember Mark Ridley-Thomas, in collaboration with the Empowerment Congress and other community partners, hosted the 29th Annual Empowerment Congress Summit. The convening summit focused on reimagining civic engagement and moving Los Angeles towards a better tomorrow.

Although this year's summit was held virtually, participants from various sectors, industries and communities were able to hear remarks from speakers from across California, including Governor Gavin Newsom, Congresswoman Karen Bass, Second District Supervisor Holly Mitchell, District Attorney George Gascon, Mayor Eric Garcetti, Council President Nury Martinez, City of Los Angeles General Managers, and community members.

"This year has been unprecedented in so many ways, including last week's horrendous events. It just shows that we can't ever take our democracy for granted. That as a diverse community, we are stronger together. But it will take work. And we must be educated, engaged, and empowered to get that work done," said Councilmember Mark Ridley-Thomas. "This summit provided an opportunity for a timely conversation on how communities and their leaders can engage, and use that engagement as fuel to build and implement the laws, policies and programs that are needed for a more resilient and better tomorrow."

“The Empowerment Congress’ unique model allows us to build a community as a unifying force through which partnerships are built and communities are transformed. Whether it’s in-person or through zoom, this year has made all of us even more determined to strengthen our communities through civic engagement and connection. And frankly, I believe there is no more important time to reimagine civic engagement, than the moment that we are in right now,” said Empowerment Congress Summit Co-Chair, Kwame Cooper.

“I look forward to turning the page and ending this national nightmare that we have experienced over the last few years. The work of the Empowerment Congress has been a model and should be replicated,” said Representative Karen Bass.

“The spirit of this summit and of this year’s theme as it relates to civic engagement - is a spirit that I think unites each and every one of us. A spirit to see the world with a different set of eyes - not just your own perspective, but to have the empathy and the understanding - the compassion, and the respect, for people regardless of their background,” said California Governor Gavin Newsom.

The Empowerment Congress is a grassroots community organization founded in 1992 by Councilmember Ridley-Thomas as a means to affect political change in the face of police brutality and lack of economic opportunity in South Los Angeles. Over the past three decades, the Empowerment Congress has promoted civic engagement by uniting residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood groups, religious institutions and community leaders in policymaking and advocacy.

“It’s not going to be easy, but through hard work and dedication, we can put an end to the racial inequalities in the criminal justice system, reinvigorate the presumption of innocence and put an end to mass incarceration. We can make our neighborhoods safer and ensure justice for all. I am glad that we are able to hold this summit, because it provides an opportunity for our residents, civil and spiritual leaders, businesses, nonprofits and grass root organizations to come together,” said District Attorney George Gascon.

“I am honored to join this year’s 29th Annual Empowerment Congress Summit. I can’t think of a better way to uplift Dr. King’s legacy than by taking the time to reconnect and reaffirm our commitment to a better tomorrow. A big shoutout and thanks to Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas and to the coalition of residents and volunteers that make this necessary event happen each and every year,” said Second District Supervisor Holly Mitchell.

Following the plenary session, attendees participated in breakout sessions that highlighted five key issues Los Angeles is currently facing: Homelessness, COVID-19 and educational loss; ensuring equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine; engaging in municipal budgetary reform in an anti-racist context and rethinking civic engagement in a post COVID-19 era.

“For nearly three decades the Empowerment Congress has shown what can happen when ordinary citizens roll up their sleeves and set out to make meaningful change. You've proven that there is no other way for Angelenos to make an impact than starting in their own backyards,” said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti.

“I thank Councilmember Ridley-Thomas for allowing me to be a part of such a transformative summit. History has taught us that when America moves, it is its people who move it. They show up in the streets and at the ballot box to dismantle the systems that were designed to keep us down. Because when we all come together, and put each other first, lasting change happens,” said Council President Nury Martinez.

“2020 was a defining year. But we did not let it define us. Dr. King once said, ‘The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members and in order to take the first step towards change, we need to do it as a community. And while we might not yet see the whole staircase, we can emerge from the unprecedented challenges of the past year and become stronger, and more focused, and build a brighter, better tomorrow,’” said Councilmember Ridley-Thomas.

For more information or to watch the entire Empowerment Congress Summit, please visit: [www.empowermentcongress.org](http://www.empowermentcongress.org)

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