



April 9, 2021

Sent via e-mail and U.S. mail

Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization
Octavio Castelo, Secretary to the County Committee
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Dear Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization members:

We are writing to register the strong opposition of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights (“SMRR”) to the City of Malibu’s pending petition to withdraw from the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (“SMMUSD”), and to form a separate Malibu school district. By this petition, Malibu seeks to withdraw its financial support from the more diverse student population in Santa Monica, a population that likely will become increasingly more diverse in the future. Malibu instead proposes to use its resources to create a district with a largely non-diverse student population that will benefit from much higher per student funding and expenditure levels. At this moment when the murder of George Floyd serves as a clarion call for all of us to proactively combat the continuing effects of systemic racism, SMRR urges you to reject Malibu’s inequitable petition.

There is no dispute that the portion of SMMUSD student population currently residing in Santa Monica is far more diverse than the portion residing in Malibu—less than half of the current SMMUSD students residing in Santa Monica are “White” (47.2%), while close to four-out-of-five current SMMUSD students residing in Malibu are “White” (78.4%).¹ This difference is not simply the result of chance. As the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law points out in its April 2020 assessment of fair housing in Santa Monica,² the high cost of housing in the West Los Angeles area (including Santa Monica) disproportionately prices out “those who are . . . Black, Hispanic, and with larger families.”³ However, with SMRR’s strong backing over the last 40+ years:

¹ See SMMUSD, *Frequently Asked Questions: Malibu Unification (Separation)* (“SMMUSD FAQs”) at 6, available at <https://www.smmusd.org/unificationFAQ>.

² See 4/1/20 City of Santa Monica Housing and Economic Development and the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, *ASSESSMENT OF FAIR HOUSING City of Santa Monica* (“SM AFH Report”) at 1 (“The City of Santa Monica’s Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH) is a thorough examination of structural barriers to fair housing choice and access to opportunity for members of historically marginalized groups protected from discrimination by the federal Fair Housing Act (FHA).”), available at https://www.smgov.net/uploadedFiles/Departments/HED/Housing_and_Redevelopment/Affordable_Housing/Reports/FinalAFH_04_01_2020.pdf.

³ SM AFH Report at 133

The City of Santa Monica has enacted numerous policies to prevent displacement and increase the supply of affordable housing, including rent control, just-cause eviction, anti-tenant harassment laws, source of income protections, and anti-discrimination laws that afford protections beyond the federal Fair Housing Act and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act. Santa Monica has also enacted mandatory inclusionary housing and spends significant local resources on affordable housing creation and rental subsidies. Santa Monica also has among the highest [Section 8 voucher] exception payment standards in the country, and is undoubtedly implementing more programs to address its fair housing needs than other actors in the region. These actions have resulted in a drastically expanded [affordable] housing stock in the City.⁴

Indeed, “[t]he City of Santa Monica provides most of the affordable housing in the West Los Angeles area.”⁵

For purposes of assessing Malibu’s petition, it also is relevant to consider the likely future diversity among the student populations that will reside in Santa Monica and will reside in Malibu. Here too the likely increasing diversity of the Santa Monica student population relative to Malibu is clear. Despite the enormous challenges created by regional housing pressures, SMRR and the City of Santa Monica remain committed to expanding affordable housing opportunities. For example, at its March 30, 2021 meeting, the Santa Monica City Council directed planning staff to prioritize 100% affordable housing projects on up to 11 identified city-owned sites with high housing potential in the upcoming 2021-2029 Housing Element (a direction backed by SMRR). This public land potentially could accommodate up to as many as 7300 new affordable housing units.⁶ And, pursuant to directives of the Santa Monica City Council, city staff is about to bring back to the Council for consideration (on May 11) a plan to provide a preference for affordable housing units to former Santa Monica residents with documented proof that they, their parents, legal guardians, or grandparents were displaced from the Belmar and 10 Freeway/Pico Corridor areas of Santa Monica by eminent domain in the 1950s and 1960s (areas that had concentrations of people of color).⁷ SMRR supports the “right to return” concept, and fully anticipates the Council will vote to adopt such a plan. These and other efforts should make the student population in Santa Monica increasingly diverse.

By its petition, Malibu seeks to withdraw its financial support from this currently more diverse, and in the future increasingly more diverse, Santa Monica student population. If you allow Malibu to do so, the predominantly “White” student population in Malibu immediately will enjoy twice as high funding and expenditures per pupil as the much more diverse student population in Santa Monica will receive. After five years, the gap will grow, and the predominantly “White” student population in Malibu will enjoy 2.5 times the funding and expenditures per pupil as the increasing more diverse student population in Santa Monica will receive.⁸

⁴ SM AFH Report at 2.

⁵ SM AFH Report at 46.

⁶ See City of Santa Monica, *Summary Report on Preliminary Suitable Sites Inventory Analysis* at 9, available at http://santamoniacityca.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_Meeting.aspx?ID=1293 (attachment c to Agenda Item 8.A).

⁷ See City of Santa Monica, *City Seeks Community Input on Displacement Policy Development (“Right to Return”)*, available at <https://www.santamonica.gov/righttoreturn>.

⁸ See SMMUSD FAQs at 2.

Respectfully, with the clarity born of both the murder of George Floyd and the highly unequal death toll wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color (and most particularly on the Latinx community), you simply must conclude that such an unequal dissolution of the 150 year school partnership between Santa Monica and Malibu is inequitable and constitutes ongoing systemic discrimination against the more diverse current and future students residing in Santa Monica. Please, just say no.

Thank you for considering SMRR's views on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Denny Zane
Co-Chair, Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights



Mike Soloff
Co-Chair, Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights