



# Stop LAPD Spying Coalition

September 7, 2015

American Civil Liberties Union – Southern California Staff, Board Members, and Supporters

The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (“coalition”) is a broad-based coalition founded over four years ago to combat the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) use of surveillance, spying, and infiltration against targeted and marginalized communities, and social movements. The coalition draws its support and membership from diverse members of the community including formerly incarcerated people, students, un-housed folks, youth, artists, immigrants, academics, lawyers, cultural workers, and faith based and community based organizations such as the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), Youth Justice Coalition (YJC) and National Lawyers Guild – Los Angeles.

The coalition has attempted to work with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California (ACLU-SC) over the years and this letter is intended as a blueprint to help ACLU-SC effectively support community-led social movements whose work overlaps with the ACLU-SC.

In working with the ACLU-SC, we’ve identified the following three areas where ACLU-SC’s current practices cause friction when working with community-led groups: transparency; accountability when working on similar and/or joint campaigns; and sharing resources or work-product with community groups.

## **Transparency**

We can only be partners if we are not undermining each other’s work. To this end we expect that any negotiations, demands, and communications with decision makers, politicians and lawmakers be immediately communicated to the community groups working on the same issues and/or in a joint campaign. We cannot be undermined nor have our work derailed by side conversations which we are central to but not a part of.

For example, in 2014 ACLU-SC held secret meetings and communications with LAPD Deputy Chief and Head of counter-terrorism Michael Downing and his team regarding the proposed “Model Surveillance and Community Safety Ordinance.” These actions not only severely undermine grassroots efforts to dismantle oppressive programs that violate our basic human rights but also render the proposed “model ordinance” tainted because it is more informed by LAPD concerns than community concerns.

We expect there will be no back-room deals that undermine our work.

We expect that any knowledge gained via legal work regarding institutions community groups are fighting against will be shared with community groups to advance their work. We also expect that any knowledge regarding ongoing abuses perpetrated by institutions will be reflected in the ACLU’s public characterization of those institutions including knowledge obtained via community-based research and shared with the ACLU.

## **Accountability on Joint Campaigns**

When we work on joint campaigns or the same issue, it is critical that a collective framework is followed for any negotiation or decision that is reached. We are stronger when we are working together: therefore, we must make decisions together and include directly impacted communities in any negotiations or decision-making process.

When we work together, in order to affirm the worth we bring to this work, it is important for legal institutions to uplift the work of grassroots organizations and give credit to community groups which help move this work forward. Often, the

media will perpetuate the power dynamic that only lawyers and legislators can speak authoritatively on issues: we expect legal institutions to subvert such oppressive practices, including the leveraging of the ACLU's clout against a diverse multitude of community voices dismissed as "fringe," and media-manufactured false impressions of (near) consensus between the state and communities.

### **Sharing Resources**

As legal institutions have the privilege of more physical and social capital than community groups, we expect allied legal institutions to leverage that capital to support and help strengthen the capacity of community groups.

At an economic level, this means when working on joint campaigns, allied legal organizations are expected to provide greater material support (copies, material development, communications, technology etc) to advance the work of joint campaign in a way that makes it clear the campaign is joint and equitable. We should dismantle the practice by which further resources are spent on already more resourced organizations (such as the ACLU). This practice is a detriment to the community needs.

At a more abstract level, we also expect legal institutions to share their social capital. This means that when we work together, it is made very clear to supporters that we are truly working together. This also means that funders should be able to identify which community groups these legal institutions are connected to and working with.

When legal institutions have the discretion to share funding, we expect funding to be directed to groups led by members of directly impacted communities. This funding/support should not be predicated by what issues are trendy or popular, but by issues the legal institution understands are critical through conversations with larger communities impacted by the issues.

### **Summary and Agreements**

We expect legal institutions to re-orient and familiarize themselves and their staff with the principles of community lawyering. Chief among these is the practice of taking cues from the community; identifying that community victories are sometimes not the same as legal victories; and that the role of the community lawyer is not to lead movements, but to support movements. The above principles and practices will help us build accountable, transparent, and equitable campaigns.

In closing we re-iterate and expect the ACLU-SC to agree with the following commitments with immediate effect and communicate in writing by November 15, 2015:

1. ACLU will communicate in writing to the undersigned organizations their commitment to the above principles;
2. ACLU will cease any and all efforts to submit and advocate for the "Model Surveillance and Community Safety Ordinance;"
3. ACLU will not engage in any back-room deal making, and any negotiations, demands, and communications with decision makers, politicians and lawmakers. If this occurs ACLU will immediately communicate these actions to community groups.

We look forward to meeting with representatives of the ACLU-SC Board and organizational leadership. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact us at [stoplapdspying@gmail.com](mailto:stoplapdspying@gmail.com)

Sincerely,

Los Angeles Community Action Network  
National Lawyers Guild - Los Angeles  
Socialist Party Los Angeles Local  
Stop LAPD Spying Coalition  
Youth Justice Coalition

Cc: American Civil Liberties Union – National Office