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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

July 11, 2024

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**LA FORWARD INSTITUTE AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS SUE LOS ANGELES OVER VENICE DELL DELAYS**

*140-unit Supportive and Affordable Housing Project Still in Limbo Because of City Obstruction and Discrimination*

**LOS ANGELES** - LA Forward Institute, taxpayers Sylvia Aroth and Professor Gary Williams, and unhoused individual Kathy Coates are suing the City of Los Angeles for obstructing the 140-unit Venice Dell Community affordable and permanent supportive housing project in Venice. They are represented by Public Counsel, Western Center for Law and Poverty, and Strumwasser & Woocher LLP.

Venice Dell is a 100% affordable and supportive housing project that will be built on a City-owned site currently used as a surface parking lot at 200 North Venice Boulevard in Venice in City Council District 11. The project, which is being developed by experienced nonprofit affordable housing developers Venice Community Housing and Hollywood Community Housing Corporation, has been in the works since 2016. It is part of the City's plan to develop its land for affordable housing. The project was vetted and considered at 18 public meetings between 2017 and 2022, and the City and the developers entered into a binding Disposition and Development Agreement in June 2022.

"All of the entitlements for the project are finished. The NIMBY lawsuits have failed. It's time for this project that would create 140 affordable homes to go forward. In particular, we need this housing built quickly on the Westside of LA, which suffers from a major shortage of affordable housing," **said David Levitus, Executive Director of LA Forward Institute.**

However, since January 2023, at the insistence of Councilmember Traci Park and City Attorney Hydee Feldstein Soto, who both oppose the project, the City has been intentionally obstructing the remaining approvals to get the project across the finish line. These delays are undermining the City's own housing policies and contributing to the city's homelessness and affordability crisis.

“While the mayor, the City Council, and the voters have been publicly supporting and adopting policies to expedite the housing solutions we need to address our urgent homelessness crisis, some elected officials, acting on bias against the project and the Black, Brown, and disabled low-income and unhoused people it will serve, are pursuing backdoor strategies to thwart those efforts. These actions constitute unlawful discrimination under state fair housing laws,” **said Faizah Malik, managing attorney in the Community Development Project at Public Counsel.** “If the City continues to stonewall Venice Dell, it will set a precedent for wealthy and connected neighbors to prevent the construction of affordable housing, which we need built in every neighborhood of our city.”

The lawsuit demands that the City move forward with all remaining approvals for Venice Dell and stop obstructing and delaying supportive and affordable housing projects. The lawsuit alleges these actions discriminate against people of color and with disabilities.

“Venice Dell will provide much-needed housing on the Westside for individuals considered ‘chronically homeless’ under federal law—meaning those who have a disability and have been homeless for more than 12 months. The California Legislature has made it unlawful for cities to impose more obstacles on the construction of affordable and permanent supportive housing than other types of housing, especially when doing so disparately impacts Black, Brown, and disabled populations,” **said Caroline Chiappetti, an attorney at Strumwasser & Woocher LLP.** “The City’s actions towards Venice Dell not only undermine its commitment to solving our housing crisis, but plainly violate our fair housing laws.”

“The affordable housing and homelessness crises are rooted in decades of entrenched exclusionary housing and development policies. We can’t keep doing the same thing and expect different results. The mayor and other city leaders claim they want more housing, they want to reduce red tape, and they want to prevent bureaucracy from slowing down the construction of desperately needed affordable housing,” **said Nisha Vyas, deputy director and senior attorney at Western Center on Law and Poverty.** “If they’re being honest with their statements to the public, they’ll work with us to quickly resolve this case and move Venice Dell forward.”

The project will provide 68 supportive housing units for individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness and 68 affordable units for low-income households and artists, along with supportive services and ground-floor commercial space.

“I couldn’t keep up with the rent at my apartment in Mar Vista and made the difficult decision to move into a motorhome over a year ago. Since my partner and I have been living in our vehicle, we’ve gotten first hand experience with how the City and some of its residents treat people like us. We just want a stable, safe, affordable home in our own community, but we need support to make ends meet. It’s time for the City to let Venice Dell be built and bring more folks like me inside,” **said unhoused Westside resident and plaintiff Kathy Coates.**

“Affordable housing is becoming increasingly rare in coastal communities like Venice, forcing out my longtime neighbors and allowing only the wealthy to move in,” **said 50-year Venice resident and plaintiff Sylvia Aroth**. “I am part of this case because I don’t want to keep seeing my neighbors displaced. I want to see my unhoused neighbors find homes in the community. We needed Venice Dells built yesterday. We need dozens more Venice Dells built across the city. I support this housing in Venice. In addition to higher wages, renter protections and supportive services, housing ends homelessness.”

The case is *LA Forward Institute et. al. v. City of Los Angeles et. al.* For more information about the lawsuit, visit [BuildVeniceDell.org](http://BuildVeniceDell.org).

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### **About Public Counsel**

Public Counsel is a nonprofit public interest law firm dedicated to advancing civil rights and racial and economic justice, as well as to amplifying the power of our clients through comprehensive legal advocacy. Founded on and strengthened by a pro bono legal service model, our staff and volunteers seek justice through direct legal services, promote healthy and resilient communities through education and outreach, and support community-led efforts to transform unjust systems through litigation and policy advocacy in and beyond Los Angeles.

### **About Western Center on Law & Poverty**

Formed in 1967, Western Center on Law & Poverty fights for justice and system-wide change to secure housing, health care, racial justice, and a strong safety net for Californians with low incomes. Western Center attains real-world, policy solutions for clients through litigation, legislative and policy advocacy, and technical assistance and legal support for the state’s legal aid programs. Western Center is the oldest and largest legal services support center in the state of California. For more information, go to <https://wclp.org/>.

### **About Strumwasser & Woocher LLP**

Since 1991, Strumwasser & Woocher LLP has represented and advised public sector clients, nonprofit organizations, and individuals across California on complex and high-profile legal issues involving local and state government, elections, education, land use, economic regulation, environmental protection, consumer protection, and workers’ rights. We are known for our successful trial and appellate litigation of landmark public policy and public-interest matters. Over the last thirty years, we have earned a wide array of victories in path-making litigation—including more than 50 published appellate decisions—and have advised clients on many of the most compelling issues facing Californians.

**About LA Forward Institute**

LA Forward Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to make local government accessible and to advance accountability through civic education, community organizing, and coalition building. We work to fulfill the promise of democracy and make Los Angeles County into a fair, flourishing place for everyone. We advance racial and economic justice across a wide range of issues, including housing, homelessness, climate change, transportation, mental health crisis response, and good government reform.