

Greetings Honorable Commission Leaders, Staff, Colleagues, and Members of our community. Thank you for inviting me to share our experiences, challenges, hopes, and dreams of an inclusive economy in the Inland Empire and where my family and I live in the City of San Bernardino.

My name is Karen Suarez, Director of Uplift San Bernardino, a collective impact initiative at the Making Hope Happen Foundation.

We are building a generation of successful adults committed to growing roots in San Bernardino through neighborhood development (i.e. homeownership and infrastructure), economic opportunities (i.e. support for entrepreneurs and workforce development), and ensuring our human capital has access to the assets in our community to thrive (i.e. mental health, early childhood resources, and more).

Partnerships and relationships in our community have existed and evolved into what Uplift San Bernardino is today. A decade ago our local school district, San Bernardino City Unified developed a 5 year Community Engagement Plan and brought stakeholders together to collaborate on improving outcomes for youth in San Bernardino, in 2018 over 40 partners came together representing over 200 stakeholders to form the collective impact initiative that I have the privilege of serving today. I share this because for over a decade, I have been a part of forums, listening sessions, and planning, throughout my career in the city and region, wearing different hats, but each time learning, growing and listening to thousands of families, students, entrepreneurs, leaders and more. Our partners have helped families keep their homes in the face of foreclosure, give small business owners a first, second, third and more chances at success, ensure that families have access to healthcare and mental health supports, connecting residents to local jobs, increasing homeownership, and most importantly that our youth connect to the unlimited opportunities found in our city and region like pathways to careers and higher education. So many assets can be found within our city boundaries and region and they are most effective when our residents know about them, can get to them, and have the time and flexibility to access them.

I share this bit of information to show that historically our residents, our neighbors have informed our governments, institutions of learning, and more on how we can build strong neighborhoods, schools, health and so much more and the solutions we are seeing today have been around since I was a child. I found a document from 1997 that perfectly outlines the work we should and can do. I was 13 years old when the Ahwahnee Economic Principles came out and have provided the pdf link for your reading pleasure(https://www.legacy.civicwell.org/docs/ahwahnee/economic_principles.pdf) it shares the ingredients to a Prosperous and Livable Community and you will see how it mirrors what we are doing through IEGO. Those with access to education and government have had the answers for decades, but we need everyone to have access to these ingredients, that is IEGO, that is Uplift San Bernardino. At Uplift San Bernardino we take action based on the priorities our residents have. Increasing homeownership, good jobs, support and provide capital to start a business, mental health support, cleaner air, workforce development, and more. Our

communities have the solutions and together, our partners have the tools to support families, but at the end of the day it is the resilient families in our communities that are transforming our city.

IEGO has been instrumental in helping leaders including myself to think about the future and integrating decarbonation strategies, language, and more to support community and economic development in our own backyards. It's one of the many reasons I agreed to serve as co-chair. What an amazing time to bring these sustainable efforts for our local families and community. Decarbonizing the logistics sector can clean our air in our AB 617 community, and lead to resilient businesses, innovation, and more job opportunities. We have to invest in makers, advanced manufacturing, clean tech, cyber security, and simultaneously community owned spaces, technical support to people that reflect priority neighborhoods and have an interest and desire to transition and decarbonize. We need to offer innovative opportunities to learn and help cities reimagine their assets and spaces to truly be public engines for lifelong learning no matter the education level. We need to infuse the arts into economic development opportunities. Arts and culture can lift up a vacant lot, or blighted building. We need to continue to expose our youth to the sectors of the future, investments in career pathways, and strengthen the connection teachers have to industry. We need to make it a priority to meet people where they are.

While this work is incredibly rewarding it is also difficult when we do not have the capacity to draw down investments for neighborhoods that have been in decline for over 20 years, when investments continue to go to the same communities that have stronger political clout or are larger organizations, or when our neighbors are hesitant to engage because they cannot trust institutions that have and continue to fail them. The jobs of the future are here, and our earnest desire is to continue to integrate IEGO efforts into our work so that our residents, no matter the zip code, can connect to economic opportunities locally. Our businesses need to match what our youth are already learning in the classroom. In San Bernardino we have special education high school students running an urban farm using ag tech, we have students learning about renewable energy and working alongside organizations like Grid Alternatives. We have student enterprises run and led by youth. We have students graduating with cybersecurity experience and exposure and going directly into higher ed programs. We need to offer small, and medium businesses support so that they can transition and directly recruit from our neighborhoods, CBO led training programs, schools, colleges, and universities.

I am a daughter of Salvadoran immigrants, first generation, and a 30+ year resident of the IE. Inclusive economic development is the path to prosperity for ALL families. When my parents fled war torn El Salvador it was their neighbors and friends that supported my parents in their transition to this country. They went to their local high school to learn English, my father worked in manufacturing and I saw what a manufacturing job could do for a family like mine, it was his colleagues that taught him about 401K, and on the job training programs. It was through a friend that my father left his 26+ year job in manufacturing and took a leap in his 50s to join the Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a technician. My father with a high school diploma works alongside

engineers and uses the skills he learned on the job to build robots that have traveled to space. My father's manufacturing job led to homeownership which was transformational for my family and for me.

Some of the greatest obstacles we have in ensuring economic prosperity for all is the lack of investment in specific neighborhoods. It is important to support workers and families to build our vibrant communities. CBOs are known to involve community members on their boards, volunteer groups, and staff, and serve as trusted messengers connecting families to the assets in our neighborhoods. We are part of the overall ecosystem that supports people and places. Policymakers can help priority neighborhoods by increasing community representation, ownership, and protecting our most vulnerable from slumlords, predatory lending, and extraction. We need to build up our infrastructure, provide sustainability and resiliency training for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and increase investment in small social enterprises and community development corporations so that physical community assets can be preserved to create the sustainable city we desire. Thank you for your time.