July 15, 2015

Councilmember Mike Bonin
200 Spring Street, Room 475
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Councilman Mike Bonin,

The Los Angeles City Council recently passed two new ordinances that make it a misdemeanor crime punishable by a fine of up to $1000 and a year in jail for a homeless person to set down his or her personal property on ANY public property in the City after given 24 hour notice to remove it.

This is the wrong approach to address a justified and shared concern that our public ways are clean and passable. A better approach is to provide homeless people with a safe place to store their property.

The City has done this for Skid Row homeless by providing a fully staffed storage facility with 1400 storage containers in the middle of Skid Row. It has so far failed to provide any free storage option for homeless people living in other parts of Los Angeles.

For the last two years, Venice Community Housing has been operating a pilot project to provide free storage for homeless people in an 8’ x 25’ metal storage container on Venice beach. It is staffed entirely by volunteers and is open 5 days/week for only one hour per day. The container has room for only 26 65-gallon trash bins provided by the City. According to the 2015 Venice homeless count, there are 2358 unhoused people living in District 11 and an estimated half of those people live in Venice. The storage container has been completely filled since January, 2014. We stopped taking names for our wait list when we reached 100. A bigger space is desperately needed for a permanent program that will accommodate the need.

On December 16, 2013 the Venice Neighborhood Council reviewed several sites and urged that you consider the vacant City owned building located at Westminster Park, formerly the Westminster Senior Center, for a permanent program location. Venice Community Housing agrees. This building is well located being close to the beach area where many homeless live yet bounded by the dog park to the east and a major highway to the west to buffer it from residential neighbors. It is large enough to accommodate at least 200 storage bins. It includes toilet facilities and is large enough to also include space to provide outreach and referral services. In the past this location has served as a pick up point for the winter shelter program and could serve that purpose again as well.

This letter urges you to work with Venice Community Housing to locate and fund a permanent free and safe storage program at the Westminster Senior Center to enable homeless residents to protect their property from confiscation and to help all of us maintain our public ways passable and free from unsightly debris. Thank you.

Sincerely,