November 5, 2025

To: Officers of the County of Los Angeles

Re: Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration

The decision to evacuate and demolish the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration was made with incomplete information.

T**he cost to bring the building to current earthquake safety standards is in the range of $100 to 150 million, not $700 million as stated in the County study.**

The County study looked only at the most expensive method for a seismic safety upgrade (called 'base isolation'). The study did not consider other, equally effective and much less expensive alternatives (such as 'shear walls' or 'diagonal bracing').

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you commission an independent and objective study of alternative safety measures, and base your plans going forward on more complete information.

You could save a half a billion dollars.

Background

County staff submitted a report to the Board of Supervisors concluding that the cost of modernizing the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration (HOA) and bringing it into compliance with current seismic safety codes was in the range of $1 billion, including about $700 for seismic safety work alone. This study considered only 'base isolation' as a seismic safety measure. Base isolation is a highly technical procedure that is used only in rare cases, typically for emergency services buildings such as hospitals which need to operate immediately after a seismic event. Based on this high cost estimate, the Board voted to buy a new high-rise building downtown, move out of the HOA, and demolish the HOA.

The County study did not consider other seismic safety retrofit alternatives that could be used for the HOA. These include shear walls, diagonal bracing, hydraulic pistons, and other available and commonly used techniques. These alternatives are much less expensive, and most can be

installed while a building is occupied. It is important to note that these methods can achieve the same level of seismic safety as required by Code.

We know this from personal and professional experience.

I served as head of real estate for the State of California and City of Los Angeles after the Loma Prieta and during the Northridge earthquakes (I also have a Structural Engineering degree from Stanford). In my public service roles, I had personal responsibility for the safety of all employees in the jurisdictions I served, and I took this responsibility very seriously. I oversaw the seismic retrofit of the California Supreme Court building in San Francisco and the adaptive reuse of the former Broadway department store in Los Angeles for government office use. In both of these projects we installed shear walls, and the seismic safety work cost less than $100 per foot in today's dollars (I also worked on Los Angeles City Hall, which was reinforced with base isolation because of its unique shape, but still cost less than $100 per foot in 2003, or $300 today.). While employed with the County of Los Angeles from 2009 to 2015, I participated in planning the seismic upgrade of the Hall of Justice, again using shear walls, at a cost of about $75 per foot. In the private sector, I worked on the Bradbury Building and Grand Central Market downtown, all under $100 per foot in today's dollars. Accordingly, I believe that the HOA – with about a million square feet of area - can be retrofitted for a cost in the range of $100 to 150 per foot, or about $100 to 150 million total for seismic work. This is far less than the $700 million estimated by the County for base isolation of the HOA.

To confirm this, I helped convene a group of prominent seismic engineers, building contractors, and architects who toured the HOA and came to the same conclusions. Significantly, some of these experts are currently working on the County's rehabilitation of General Hospital - a building that is older, taller, and harder to adapt than the HOA. They noted that the seismic work on this project is in the range of $125 per foot.

Therefore, we think it is appropriate and very much in the public interest to conduct an independent, objective review of alternative seismic safety procedures for the HOA, and to base subsequent decisions on the results.

Sincerely,

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