

BUDGET MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 6, 2024

TO: Oakland City Council and Members of the Public

FROM: District 4 Councilmember Janani Ramachandran, District 5 Councilmember Noel Gallo, and District 7 Councilmember Treva Reid

SUBJECT: East Oakland Community Safety Ambassador Strategy As an Amendment to Proposed Mid-Cycle Budget FY 24-25

Dear City Council Colleagues and Members of the Public,

In a challenging fiscal environment with unprecedented revenue shortfalls, we recognize that difficult decisions must be made regarding spending our limited dollars. Despite these challenges, the three of us Councilmembers, inclusive of all of the major East Oakland commercial corridors, are prioritizing public safety in our budget amendments. These amendments are presented collectively for the June 12th City Council Budget meeting, and we will also present other amendments in upcoming budget meetings.

One of the many tools with which we can pursue public safety is through **Community Safety Ambassadors**, a tried and tested method to ensure that more Oakland residents feel safe in their local shopping corridors. The presence of ambassadors serves as critical eyes and ears on our streets to prevent commercial burglaries as well as violent crime. They help build community and collaboration among small business owners and help create an environment where our residents feel safe walking, shopping, and dining. We know that a holistic strategy to improve our city's economic revival post-pandemic depends on the strength of our small businesses, which have struggled so deeply in the past two years from repeated break-ins, violent robberies, gun violence, and assault. Many have been forced to leave Oakland, and others feel so depleted in their efforts that they are contemplating leaving. The overwhelming majority of small businesses in East Oakland, across the Fruitvale, Dimond, Laurel, and Hegenberger corridors, are owned by black and brown Oakland residents, many of whom have given decades of their lives to serving their communities. These businesses are simply not just in it for profit, but are doing this work to contribute to their communities and the diverse cultural fabric that makes up the vibrancy of the town.

All three of us advocated strongly for community safety ambassadors in the FY 2023–2025 budget. In our individual budget amendment proposals, we shared a vision for a dedicated East Oakland safety ambassador strategy across our districts. This is particularly because East Oakland commercial corridors have been historically neglected by Oakland leadership, and they have remained deeply underinvested. Although our proposed amendments did not pass, we were told that the East Oakland business corridors would be considered in the \$1 million that did pass for FY 23–24 and the \$1 million that passed for FY 24–25. While Hegenberger and Fruitvale were given small allocations of this \$1 million in the first year, we were dismayed that Laurel and Dimond were not included with this investment, given the gravity of the commercial burglaries as well as the violent crime impacting the area. However, we were initially heartened by the fact that they would be considered in the FY 24–25 round of funding and had also anticipated that the Hegenberger and Fruitvale programs would continue in FY 24–25 as well.

To our deep disappointment, the mayor's proposed budget cut the entirety of the \$1 million allocated for FY 24–25. The rationale provided was even more dismaying and factually untrue, stating that “those communities most impacted by crime have already been able to leverage philanthropic and private investment.” While we are positively thrilled that our neighbors in Downtown, Chinatown, and Lakeshore were able to leverage the Mayor's support in procuring \$3.5 million for their ambassador programs – programs we know are seeing great success in reducing crime and building neighborhood trust – East Oakland, however, once again was left out of such efforts and remains needing to fend for itself. Many of these neighborhoods in and around Downtown Oakland have been able to leverage millions of dollars from external agencies over the years, largely because their programs have been in existence for a long period of time. In East Oakland, the concept of safety ambassadors is relatively new yet deeply successful in their pilots – however, our respective attempts to discuss these initiatives with philanthropy and private investment have indicated that initial city investment is critical to obtaining these funders' trust and support.

Moreover, the crime data speaks for itself about the need for resources in East Oakland. As per the latest OPD Crime Data report presented to the Public Safety Committee, Area 4 (which includes Fruitvale, Dimond, and Laurel) experienced a 20% increase in robberies between Year to Date (“YTD”) 2024 and the 3-year YTD average, and a 13% increase in burglaries in this same period. In contrast, Area 1 (which includes Downtown, part of Lake Merritt, and Chinatown) saw a decrease in burglaries by 39% and a decrease in robberies by 17% in the same time period.

Pilot programs in our respective districts demonstrate that a small amount of money can stretch a long way when it comes to results. For example, last year the Laurel business district had a [pilot safety ambassador program](#) (funded by \$93,750 from the District 4 Direct Community Grant program, which is also slated to be cut this fiscal year) that funded the Laurel's first comprehensive ambassador program for 6 weeks during the peak holiday season crime wave between December 1 and January 15. The Laurel saw a decrease in violent crime by 36% and a fall in property crime by 24%, with far fewer commercial break-ins than typically experienced during the holiday period. Yet crime levels rose by 32% in the immediate six weeks following the completion of the ambassador pilot. The ambassadors also led to increased feelings of security in the area, with 90% of residents surveyed saying they felt safer in the district and 75% of respondents saying they were more likely to shop and eat in the Laurel as a result.

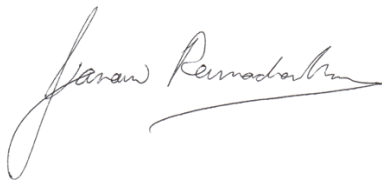
The Hegenberger corridor has benefited greatly from the presence of the neighborhood safety ambassadors, in addition to support and collaboration from our OPD and CHP partners in the area. The Black Cultural Zone Safety Ambassadors engage with businesses and patrons along the Hegenberger Corridor from the airport to International Blvd., providing a visible safety presence, homeless outreach, and merchant engagement services. Since these community partnerships have been developed, the Hegenberger corridor has seen a significant decrease in crime from these collective public safety efforts. Since August 2023, there has been a 63% decrease in auto burglaries, a 49% decrease in larceny and theft, and a 7% decrease in robberies. The ambassadors have also reported 3000 business interactions in the 2023–2024 program year. Year-to-date, Police Area 6 has seen a -18% decrease in homicides, -74% burglary, and a -42%

decrease overall in all serious crimes in the area. District 7 is ranked among one the highest tax revenue generating corridors in the City and as home to the Oakland Airport, it acts as a gateway into this region. Sustaining this investment in our safety ambassadors is critical to the monumental strides that the City has made to prevent and deter rampant crime and violence in this area and ensure that we are protecting our community, visitors, and assets.

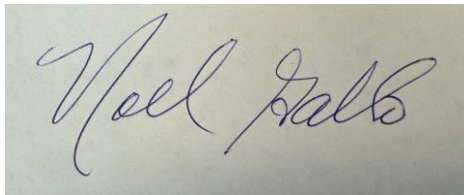
Our goal is not to be limiting; we are impressed by the success of programs in other parts of Oakland and their ability to grow and sustain, and we hope to learn from their models to incorporate into East Oakland districts. We simply believe that the most under-invested regions of Oakland now deserve attention to keep our neighborhoods safe, our commercial corridors vibrant, and our small business community rooted in Oakland.

We look forward to collaborating with our Council colleagues to ensure that we can fund a budget that reflects our core values and our mandates as public servants to Oakland, with a focus on public safety that is inclusive of equity needs for East Oakland.

In Community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janani Ramachandran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Janani Ramachandran
Oakland City Councilmember, District 4

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noel Gallo". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large loop at the end.

Noel Gallo
Oakland City Councilmember, District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Treva Reid". The signature is cursive and features a large, prominent loop at the end.

Treva Reid

Oakland City Councilmember, District 7