

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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COVID-19 Memorial: Remembering Angelenos

For over two and a half years, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the lives of residents across Los Angeles County. Businesses have been upended, schools and places of worship had to close, and stark disparities that have long existed within the County were exposed.

To meet this unprecedented challenge, Los Angeles County made equity their guiding principle for the COVID-19 response. Early in the pandemic, that meant protecting essential workers, setting up testing sites in hard-hit communities, and providing personal protective equipment to those most at risk. And last year, with three highly effective vaccines available to slow the spread and save lives, Los Angeles County worked tirelessly to lower barriers and increase access for all residents, regardless of where they live.

Yet, tragically over 33,000 have lost their lives to date. Each of these lives represented much more than a statistic. Some were doctors, nurses, and custodial workers, who selflessly put their lives on the line. Others were first responders – firefighters and emergency medical services workers – who responded to COVID-related crisis calls at homes. Many were essential workers who did not have the option to stay

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home and came to work each day so Los Angeles County could keep running. And some were residents of nursing homes who were especially devastated by COVID-19. All of them have loved ones who will miss them dearly.

Though this pandemic impacted everyone, it didn't affect everyone equally. Low-income communities of color have taken the brunt of the health and economic consequences. Throughout this pandemic, Latinx and Black residents have been the most likely to contract and ultimately pass away from this virus and its variants. Cumulatively, the case and death rates among Black residents are 1.2 and 1.7 times higher, respectively, than case and death rates among white residents. Disparities are even larger for Latinx residents, with their case and death rates 1.7 and 2.5 times higher, respectively, than among white residents. These are populations who make up our essential workers, many of whom live in multi-family units and are unable to safely isolate in the comfort of their homes, thus spreading the disease to close contacts. And they have suffered from years of underinvestment, lacking access to healthcare, and living in polluted areas impacting their overall well-being, resulting in chronic conditions that made them vulnerable.

Although the County continues to confront the pandemic, there are fortunately more tools available through vaccines, therapeutics, testing, and personal protective equipment to keep residents safe. As a result, many residents are able to live and operate daily with reduced fear and anxiety of serious outcomes. However, it is important to remember and memorialize those residents we have lost, especially by utilizing the healing medium of the arts.

The benefits of the arts are many, and everyone deserves to have equal access

to them. In a County as ethnically and culturally diverse as well as geographically sprawling as Los Angeles, it is our responsibility to ensure that all the benefits of, and opportunities provided by, the arts are available and accessible to all residents, no matter who they are or where they live.

There is growing research and proven connections demonstrating that arts can make a positive impact on health across mental health, physical health, and public health, for all communities. Even more, the arts can bring people together across demographic, economic, and social lines. They are places where people can both see and express themselves, their communities, and their cultures in public performances, cultural activities, and exhibitions. Everyone should experience the healing power of the arts. We must never forget the ones we've lost to COVID-19. We owe it to their memory to honor them and allow Angelenos to express their grief and heal.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Arts and Culture, in collaboration with the Department of Public Health and community, to identify opportunities to honor those lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Los Angeles County, and report back to the Board of Supervisors in six months with options, including costs, and projected timeframes.

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