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The
California
Endowment

October 21, 2011

Bill Lindsay, City Manager
The City of Richmond
450 Civic Center Plaza, 3rd floor
Richmond, CA 94806

Re: Operation Peacemaker Fellowship

Dear Mr. Lindsay,

In July of this year, The California Endowment made an investment of \$200,000 in the City of Richmond's Operation Peacemaker Fellowship, a program run out of the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). There were many good reasons for making this grant. Over the past year and half, the Endowment had supported a comprehensive community planning process – Healthy Richmond – to identify the most urgent needs and opportunities facing Richmond residents. From the nearly 1700 surveys completed by youth and adults, the majority identified safety as their chief concern. The Endowment understands that we will fall short in achieving a collective vision of building a healthy community for all of Richmond's children unless the scourge of violence is eliminated.

Effectively tackling violence, particularly gun violence, is complex. Many cities are reaching the correct conclusion that a sole focus on suppression and enforcement is insufficient in reducing deadly violence. Rather, as the growing body of practice and research affirms, communities must adopt comprehensive and multi-sector approaches that emphasize prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies, and address risk and resilience factors among young people. Moreover, as the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) affirms in its report on best practices in addressing community gang problems, critical elements include the provision of supports and opportunities that directly target high risk youth individually, and provide access to a variety of services that assist them to adopt prosocial values and that meet their social, educational, and vocational needs.¹

The City of Richmond demonstrated responsive leadership in 2007 when it established ONS to complement the work of law enforcement and community-based organizations in creating a safe community. Since that time, ONS has established a successful street outreach strategy that, too, is considered a best practice approach. Operation Peacemaker is a wise extension of the street outreach work. Building upon a carefully cultivated set of relationships with

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some of the city's most violent young men, Operation Peacemaker offers a legitimate path to a new way of life. As we understand, Operation Peacemaker is only program of this kind in Richmond that successfully engages these men in trust-based relationships. At the time the grant to the program was made, Operation Peacemaker was able to report that all 21 fellows in the original cohort were alive and, of the 18 fellows who completed the first 6 months of the program, all remained free of involvement in gun violence. These compelling statistics motivated our leadership to support this incredible work.

The fight that broke out at City Hall on October 14th was unfortunate and we trust that city leadership will respond appropriately to ensure the safety of its staff. We recognize that the hard work to turn lives around is not easy and replete with risks. These risks need to be continually assessed and mitigated. Nevertheless, the Endowment stands firmly behind the vision and approach of Operation Peacemaker. As you know, the foundation's 10-year Building Healthy Communities effort includes a deliberate focus on boys and young men of color because of the serious health inequities they face. The statistics bear out a disturbing reality that too many of our boys and young men in communities like Richmond, East Oakland, Fresno and South Los Angeles, are being left behind, without viable opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives. We are committed to working directly with partner communities to create pathways to a healthy future for all boys and young men of color.

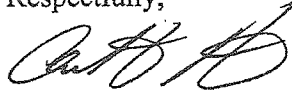
There is much criticism of the use of stipends by ONS in Operation Peacemaker. In our experience as a funder of hundreds of community-based programs that engage underserved segments of the population, especially low-income youth, the use of stipends is a perfectly appropriate tactic to incentivize participation and the achievement of goals. Moreover, considering the population targeted by Operation Peacemaker, the use of stipends should be viewed as critical to counteract the overwhelming pull of available but illicit income-generating options.

The desire to change their lives, prompting from a trusted adult, or the opportunity for income all appear to be factors that motivate high-risk youth to join programs. Relationships with staff, a sense of belonging, and having their needs and interests met appear to be factors that make them stay."

We hope to continue to partner with you, ONS, and other city departments to ensure that, collectively, we are committing precious resources in the most effective and impactful ways possible to meet the needs of Richmond's children and families. The community deserves no less. We welcome the opportunity to help shed light on the best and most promising practices to reduce violence and promote healthy youth development.

We believe Operation Peacemaker is a valuable asset to Richmond and should be preserved.

Respectfully,



Anthony Iton, MD
Senior Vice President, Building Healthy Communities

Cc: DeVone Boggan, Director, Office of Neighborhood Safety

ⁱ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (October 2010). *Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems: OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model*. Available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/231200.pdf

ⁱⁱ Public/Private Ventures (September 2002). *Serving High-Risk Youth: Lessons from Research and Programming*. Available at www.hewlett.org/uploads/files/ServingHighRiskYouth.pdf

