

## INTRADPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

February 22, 2013  
12.3

**TO:** The Honorable Board of Police Commissioners

**FROM:** Chief of Police

**SUBJECT:** RECOMMENDATION FOR THE POLICE COMMISSION DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. That the Board of Police Commissioners (Board) award the Police Commission Distinguished Service Medal for exceptional service to:

Songhai Miguda-Armstead, Assistant Supervising City Attorney

### DISCUSSION

It is recommended the Board award the Police Commission Distinguished Service Medal for exceptional service to Songhai Miguda-Armstead.

In 2006, the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, in conjunction with the Los Angeles Police Department (Department) and several primary service providers in the Skid Row area, entered into an organized effort to address quality of life, crime and public health issues. Assistant Supervising City Attorney Songhai Miguda-Armstead was selected to direct the Los Angeles City Attorney's involvement in this collaboration. Thus, the Central Area Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) was born, with Songhai Miguda-Armstead serving at the forefront of a partnership between the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office and the task force dedicated by the Department. Together, these individuals were tasked with developing and implementing a system of enforcement, enhancement, and outreach that would focus on reducing crime and eliminating urban blight and decay.

The overall goals of SCI were far-reaching and multi-faceted to:

- Create cleaner and safer streets;
- Restore a sense of law and order;
- Reduce the availability of illegal drugs;
- Protect the most vulnerable from criminal predators;
- Eliminate the gang presence in, and influence over, Skid Row;
- Abate the health hazards and unsanitary conditions;
- Connect persons who need, want and would benefit from assistance with appropriate services;
- Protect the rights of law-abiding occupants of resident hotels and other affordable housing facilities;

- Protect the personal property of homeless persons against theft as well as inadvertent seizure and destruction;
- End the practice of "homeless patient dumping";
- Make full use of available shelter beds;
- Improve the appearance of the streets and other public areas for the enjoyment of all;
- Improve relations between different socioeconomic groups residing in the Skid Row area;
- Allow for the downtown economic expansion without impinging on the rights or adding to the plight of the less fortunate; and,
- Demonstrate a long-term commitment by City of Los Angeles (City) agencies to identify, address and solve problems of all Skid Row residents and stakeholders.

Officers assigned to SCI engaged in non-traditional and community-based policing in an effort to strengthen relationships in the area and facilitate long-term solutions. The partnership, support, engagement, and leadership provided by Songhai Miguda-Armstead were imperative to the success of these efforts. Personnel involved in the SCI effort quickly found themselves thrust to the forefront of the various political, social, environmental and economic issues that plagued the Skid Row area. The SCI officers, along with Songhai Miguda-Armstead and her subordinate deputy city attorneys, led an effort to provide alternatives to the conventional judicial system and access to other government services for Skid Row residents. Monthly Skid Row Enhancement meetings, frequently directed by Songhai Miguda-Armstead, engaged representatives from various City services to ensure that issues involving street and sidewalk repair, street lighting and sanitation were being adequately addressed. Partnerships and relationships were established with the management of the various service providers, residents and homeless persons, business owners and business improvement districts. Songhai Miguda-Armstead's involvement was the key to success in the majority of these efforts.

Chief among the programs designed by Songhai Miguda-Armstead for outreach and referrals was the Streets or Services (SOS) Program. The SOS was a collaboration between the Los Angeles Police Department, the City Attorney's Office, and various service providers in the area. It is a post-arrest, pre-booking diversion program where homeless persons arrested for non-violent misdemeanor crimes were given the option of a 21-day program in a residential facility in lieu of prosecution. The program was structured around the belief that many of those living on the street were not be aware of the plethora of services available to them and many others were resistant to entering services unless they perceive it as the "lesser of two evils" (i.e., better than going to jail).

In support of the SOS Program, SCI officers conduct a preliminary screening of arrestees and made referrals to on-call case workers who respond to the station for further evaluation. If the arrestee met the required criteria and was accepted into the program, a Release from Custody (RFC) citation was issued and the arrestee leaves the station with the case worker. All of this happened within the first hour after an arrest, bypassing the entire booking process and avoiding the necessity for arrestees to ever set foot in a jail facility. The arrestee was then placed in an appropriate residential program with an SOS partner facility based on specific needs (i.e.,

addiction, mental health issues, anger management, or job training). Upon successful completion of the 21-day program, the City Attorney's Office officially declined to file charges for the original misdemeanor offense and the participant was provided with an opportunity to move onto a more structured six-month program in transitional housing. The SOS program was designed and implemented solely through the efforts of Songhai Miguda-Armstead.

In the years of SCI's existence, Songhai Miguda-Armstead's SOS Program managed over 2,000 SOS referrals, diverting people from a jail booking and subsequent criminal proceedings. This effort provided individuals with an opportunity to get off the streets and improved their lives through the various structured assistance programs. In the monthly homeless count conducted by SCI personnel in September 2006, 1,876 people were found to be sleeping on the sidewalk in encampments that included 518 tents or makeshift shelters. By March 2010, this number was reduced to 701 persons sleeping in 530 tents, tarps or boxes. This significant reduction in the hard-core homeless population of Skid Row was directly attributable to Songhai Miguda-Armstead's ingenuity in the form of programs such as SOS.

Another program which was crucial to SCI's mission was the Homeless Alternatives for People Living on the Street (HALO). Again, the design and implementation of this program was spearheaded by Songhai Miguda-Armstead, who also engaged the Office of the Public Defender and area service providers to support it. The HALO program offers alternatives for individuals who were unable to pay the fees and penalties for traffic citations and other minor offenses. Instead, these individuals, many of them residents or members of the Skid Row homeless, were referred to a service provider to engage in community service work or counseling for hours commensurate with their fines. Individuals were essentially given the opportunity to work off their fines while receiving counseling for drug addiction, anger management, job training, or while connecting with emergency or transitional housing providers or managers of other assistance programs. Through Songhai Miguda-Armstead's management, the issuance of citations by SCI officers not only provided the education necessary to modify the behavior which led to the offense, but possibly provided another avenue for connecting the violator with services and counseling he or she might not otherwise have known existed.

The unique programs designed and supported by Songhai Miguda-Armstead provided life changing and lifesaving services. They rely upon ongoing support, participation, and staffing by appropriately and uniquely trained, experienced, and dedicated City Attorney and law enforcement personnel for their historical and continued success. Through Songhai Miguda-Armstead's tremendous efforts and engagement, the 50-officer SCI task force was able to participate in true Broken Windows-style community policing. Having taken the time to become an expert on the crime and public nuisance issues of Skid Row, Songhai Miguda-Armstead supported strategic enforcement and prosecution for those crimes frequently considered low grade or low priority in other communities. Songhai Miguda-Armstead recognized and successfully argued the need to prosecute these crimes in order to chip away at the environment of overall lawlessness and community disrespect which led to greater crime and violence. This resulted in the identification and prosecution of many of those engaged in "anchor" behaviors and violators who, through seemingly minor criminal behavior, provided cover for the narcotics sales and assaults.

By engaging in the enforcement and successful prosecution, the message was clearly sent to the community that the expectation of behavior was a parody to anywhere else in the City of Los Angeles. The residents of Skid Row were equally deserving of being treated with dignity and residing in a safe and clean environment. Similarly, those engaged in more serious and violent offenses knew their behavior would not be tolerated as the "cover" behind which they engaged in their activities became an increasing focus of enforcement and prosecution.

The effects of the Broken Windows enforcement efforts on the crime rate in Skid Row were notable and impressive. A comparison of crime rates for 2005 versus 2010 revealed an overall 42 percent drop in Part I Crimes. When compared, the yearly incidents of crime in 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010, to the reported crime in 2005 (the last full year without SCI in operation), these numbers translated to the following cumulative results: seven fewer homicides, 913 fewer people robbed, 511 people not violently assaulted, 421 fewer residences or businesses burglarized, and 311 fewer vehicles stolen over the three-year period.

A look at the incidents of death on Skid Row provided an even more eye-opening account of the changes that transpired, largely due to referral efforts such as Songhai Miguda-Armstead's SOS program. In 2005, 102 people died on Skid Row as a result of non-homicide causes such as overdose, suicide, exposure, untreated health issues, and disease. By 2009, this number was reduced to 68, reflecting a 34 percent drop. Over the intervening four years, over 100 human lives were not lost. However, when a closer analysis was conducted related to deaths that occurred outside, on the streets, sidewalks, or in the alleys and parks, a more startling statistic was revealed. By 2009, the number of people who died in public areas and the streets of Skid Row was reduced by 50 percent.

In October 2009, the Ninth Street Elementary School, located on the southern perimeter of Skid Row, began conducting after school field trips on each Friday of the school year. Teachers, with assistance and support from SCI officers, the area's Senior Lead Officer, in addition to officers who were assigned to the Department of General Services, Office of Public Safety, and security officers from the Central City East Association, escorted students from the school to Gladys Park. This simple act would have been unimaginable several years ago, as the physical environment would have placed the children's safety in jeopardy. Today, however, the children are able to enjoy several hours per week of freedom and outdoor play that was not previously afforded to them.

Over Christmas 2005, volunteers from the Union Rescue Mission set out to deliver thousands of meals to the residents of various SRO hotels in the area. As they attempted to negotiate the streets of Skid Row, they were accosted by various persons who stepped out of their encampments. The volunteers were cursed at and subjected to threats and racial epithets. In contrast, the 2009, 2010, and 2011 holiday seasons transpired without violence or disruption of any kind.

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The meticulous and innovative effort put forth by Assistant Supervising City Attorney Songhai Miguda-Armstead has resulted in breakthrough programs, not only incredible Community-based policing, but "community-based government" efforts. Songhai Miguda-Armstead's untiring efforts and dedication to the SCI's mission has literally been responsible for saving individual lives. For her outstanding collaborative efforts, commitment, and relentless perseverance in creating a safer community within Skid Row, she is undoubtedly deserving of the Department's Police Commission Distinguished Service Medal.

Should you have any questions, please contact Commander Stuart A. Maislin, Personnel and Training Bureau, at (213) 486-7090.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Beck', written over a circular stamp or seal.

CHARLIE BECK  
Chief of Police