



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 25, 2010

**Contact:** Aurelio Rojas 213-280-6579

James Bolden 213-200-5314

## **SUPERVISOR RIDLEY-THOMAS WELCOMES 1,500 RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO THE 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS SUMMIT**

*Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, is keynote speaker*

**LOS ANGELES** -- Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and keynote speaker Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the national Children's Defense Fund, were joined Saturday by an estimated audience of more than 1,500 people at the Second District's 18<sup>th</sup> annual summit of the Empowerment Congress.

The constituent-based partnership of neighborhood groups, business and religious institutions was founded by Ridley-Thomas when he was a member of the Los Angeles City Council to increase community participation and make government more responsive and is widely viewed as the precursor to the city's Neighborhood Councils.

"We are the keys to change, but only if we are educated, engaged and empowered for action," the Supervisor told the enthusiastic, standing-room only audience in the packed Loker Student Union on the campus of California State University, Dominguez Hills, in Carson. About 200 people watched his address on a live video feed in an overflow room.

The Supervisor cited several accomplishments during his recently completed first year on the Board of Supervisors that were achieved because residents of the Second District mobilized, including a new Martin Luther King, Jr. Hospital scheduled to open in 2012 and a light rail system from Crenshaw Boulevard to Los Angeles International Airport that could be completed as early as 2016.

In introducing Mrs. Edelman, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas cited her lifetime of historic achievements grounded in activism, beginning in the mid-1960s when she was the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar Association and directed the state's NAACP's Legal Defense and Educational Fund during the height of the civil rights movement.

“She has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional life,” the Supervisor said. “Under her leadership, the Children’s Defense Fund has become the nation’s strongest voice for children and families.”

Mrs. Edelman, who is now at the forefront of the effort to provide universal health care for children, told the crowd that this summer her organization will partner with the Supervisor Ridley-Thomas to open five “Freedom Schools” in the Second District.

Mrs. Edelman praised the Supervisor for making children and education a priority in his district, calling him a “Doer – not a talker.” She applauded him for building a grass roots movement.

“If you have communities that empower families, you will have communities that are empowered,” she said.

The Children’s Defense Fund currently operates more than 100 of the schools nationwide. The six-week program is built upon the twin prongs of inspiring a love for reading and fostering an enhanced feeling of self-worth among children. Parents are required to participate in the program and encouraged to engage in social action.

Saturday’s summit also included workshops on issues ranging from bridging health disparities in the Second District to economic development opportunities along the Crenshaw/LAX light rail system.

In addition, more than two dozen County department’s staffed booths offering a variety of information and resources -- and the Public Health Department administered free H1N1 flu vaccinations on site.

The Second Supervisorial District includes the cities of Carson, Compton, Culver City, Gardena, Hawthorne, Inglewood, Lawndale and Lynwood. With 2.3 million residents the district also includes, but is not limited to portions of the unincorporated communities of Alondra Park, Athens, Del Aire, Dominguez, East Compton, El Camino Village, Florence, Ladera Heights, Lennox, View Park, West Athens, West Carson, West Compton, Willowbrook, and Wiseburn.

For more information on the Empowerment Congress, log onto [www.empowermentcongress.org](http://www.empowermentcongress.org)

# # #