BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

866 KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION / LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012 / (213) 974-2222

MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT

June 25, 2013

Ms. Fabian Wesson, Chair
California Science Center Board of Directors
700 Exposition Park Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90037

Dear Madame Chair:

The California Science Center Board of Directors is positioned to take a great step forward for our community today, and I urge you to do so by approving a new lease agreement with the University of Southern California (USC).

My concern for Exposition Park runs deep. Long before I was a public official I was among the many school children who visited the park and I continue to live nearby. My largest supervisorial field office is also located in the park.

Preserving access to the park's museums, especially for children and families whose visits are made possible by free or low-priced admission to its attractions, will always be a matter of firm commitment for me.

The pending arrangement with USC comes from a convergence of several unique circumstances. The Coliseum is unable to make costly repairs required by USC's current lease. USC has in its current lease the option to terminate or to require the Coliseum to pay USC to finance the repairs, which the Coliseum simply cannot afford.

The new lease with USC will maintain the Coliseum as a public facility. USC will invest at least $70 million to pay for repairs and improvements that will keep the Coliseum from becoming an eyesore in Exposition Park. It is not a land grab, though that characterization is liberally put forth in news reports.

Some critics portray USC as an exclusive institution for the privileged that would "privatize" the Coliseum at the expense of the neighboring community.

As a Coliseum Commissioner who has also represented USC's neighborhoods for 20 years, as a City Councilman, State legislator and now County Supervisor, I

find such stereotyping of USC to be as distorted and harmful as the stereotypes that some perpetuate about South Los Angeles itself.

USC has not given up on its neighborhood, even when others, including the National Football League, have done so. Rather, it has invested millions into the neighborhood, doing more than any other institution to beautify and enhance its landscape. The university has been a springboard for the advancement of thousands of people -- many from this very community.

Characteristically, USC has engaged in more than 40 stakeholder meetings and four public hearings. All draft agreements were publicly posted both by the university and the State of California.

Both the immediate community and Los Angeles as a whole deserve a world-class venue. USC is the only institution showing the interest and ability to make that happen.

Although negotiations may have at times been contentious, the broad spectrum of public officials and private citizens who now support the new lease is a testament to the open and inclusive process you have promoted and of which you should rightly be proud.

USC may not win every game it plays in the Coliseum, but in this case, the agreement forged by the Science Center Board and the university will represent a victory for all of Los Angeles for generations to come.

With hope,

MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Supervisor, Second District
Chairman, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors