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[Transforming Communities with the Empowerment Congress](#)

At the 27th Annual Empowerment Congress Summit on Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Weekend, 1,200 people came to bear witness and celebrate the many ways that civic engagement can profoundly transform communities for the better.

Held at the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU) in Willowbrook for the first time ever, the Summit featured speeches from Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, founder of the Empowerment Congress; as well as U.S. Rep. Karen Bass, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus; U.S. Rep. Nanette Barragán, whose congressional district includes Willowbrook; and Humboldt County Supervisor Virginia Bass, president of the California State Association of Counties.

“Dr. King stands as a global giant, one who stirred our souls and sparked our conscience to not only dream big for ourselves but to act boldly to ensure a better tomorrow,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “By continuing to be steadfast in our efforts to spur not just change but transformative change, we will succeed in building communities of opportunity for all Angelenos.”

“The beauty of the Empowerment Congress is that it is a vehicle from which people can directly and consistently participate in their government,” Rep. Bass added. “For years, members of the Empowerment Congress have stuck with the hard work of representing the conflicting interests in our community and working together to help our community. If this body existed around the nation, Americans

everywhere would understand their responsibility to participate beyond the voting booth. I'm honored to be a part of this."

"To produce lasting positive change in a community, its residents must first recognize their strength and power," Rep. Barragan said. "Thanks to the grassroots leadership of the Empowerment Congress and Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, more families in the Watts-Willowbrook area are being empowered to develop solutions to our most pressing issues and leading change through action. I am glad to see this year's Empowerment Congress convening hosted in my Congressional District and look forward to the positive results it produces."

The theme of the Summit was *Transforming Communities*, and the plenary session showcased how the Empowerment Congress has supported community transformation over years, including advocating for the rebirth of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital, ramping up innovative solutions to homelessness, promoting workforce development in the bioscience industry, and calling for more diversity in the creative economy.

The Summit also featured five interactive workshops and a bus tour of Willowbrook, a community that once reeled from civil unrest but has since been transformed in recent years by unprecedented development that includes the sprawling Martin Luther King, Jr. Medical Campus, Metro's Rosa Parks Station, Magic Johnson Park, and CDU.

CDU President and CEO Dr. David Carlisle said, "As a community-founded educational institution located in an under-resourced area, we recognize the importance of formally organized civic engagement as a means of effective positive change. It was a similar dynamic that led to the creation of CDU in the wake of the Watts Revolt over five decades ago. We look forward to working with Empowerment Congress leadership and all participants to transform South LA and communities like it."

Since 1992, the Empowerment Congress has worked to educate, engage, and empower individuals and communities to take control of their futures. A precursor to neighborhood councils, it is a dynamic partnership among neighborhood groups, residents, nonprofit organizations, businesses, religious institutions, and community leaders within the diverse communities of LA County's Second Supervisorial District.

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