



**Sherman Oaks
Neighborhood Council**

Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council (shermanoaksnc.org)

April 15, 2025

Nithya Raman, Councilmember 4th District
Los Angeles City Council and its Committees
City Ethics Commission

Against — [CF 16-1104-S3](#). City Council Rules / Council Rule 7 / Council Rule 63 / N-Word and C-Word Epithets / Amendments.

To Councilmember Nithya Raman, all City Councilmembers, and Ethics Commission members,

The Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council (SONC) in a 12-1 vote at its April 14, 2025 meeting adopted a position to oppose Council File 16-1104-S3 proposing an amendment to City Council rules to prohibit the use of certain words and slurs. Although we share Council's revulsion at such offensive language, SONC in debate noted rules already exist to address fighting words, threats, and other disruptions pursuant to California law and, furthermore, this proposed rule violates the First Amendment of the US Constitution, California's Brown Act, among others, and opens the City to significant legal liability pertaining to the infringements of the rights of City Council's constituency, while promoting authoritarianism and censorship in an era when our very democracy is at risk thanks to rules and actions similar to this. For these aforementioned reasons, SONC requests our representative CM Nithya Raman withdraw her second, especially given that CM Raman's reasons for opposing SONC's position on past efforts including but not limited to the Ethel development project and Bonseph-Helinet lease was her concern that voting with her constituency would expose the City to legal liability. As this proposed rule will undoubtedly result in significant legal liability exposure, we request CM Raman use this consistent logic to oppose this motion.

Adopted motion:

While we do not condone the use of any slurs or epithets during council meetings or at any time, we consider this attempt by City Council to ban members of the public from using specific words during public comment period a blatant attack on free speech as guaranteed by the 1st Amendment of the United States Constitution.

The language used in the court case cited as precedent in this council file [CHAPLINSKY V. NEW HAMPSHIRE, 315 U.S. 568 (1942)] which was directed at a U.S. Marshal arresting Chaplinsky was: "You are a goddamned racketeer" and "a damned fascist".

In the news outlet Westside Current, Council President Harris-Dawson is quoted as saying he "expects his colleagues to add additional language", and "This is as much a step as we can take at this moment, we believe. But we think it will open us up to take additional steps in the future" Indicating that the two epithets outlined in the council file are just the starting point to this attempt at dictating what the public can and cannot say during public comment period at City Council meetings.

The Council President also stated that he's "Eager to get in front of a judge" indicating that he anticipates lawsuits will be filed against the city for violation of free speech as guaranteed by the 1st Amendment. In the case MICHAEL HUNT V. CITY OF LOS ANGELES, No. 12-55709 (9th Cir. 2013) the City of Los Angeles paid \$215,000 to settle with the plaintiff. An L.A. Times article about the case published June 12, 2014 states:

"Councilman Bernard C. Parks described the payment as a 'business decision,' arguing that the city would have had to pay far more had the case gone to trial. A judge in a separate federal case recently found that Los Angeles violated the free speech rights of two other men who were repeatedly ejected from council meetings.

"Although a jury awarded each man only \$1 over that matter, the city still had to pay around \$600,000 in legal fees for that case, Parks said."

Considering the significant liability costs the City of Los Angeles incurs every year, this is an irresponsible misuse of power on the part of City Council that has potential to burden taxpayers with costly litigation and/or settlement payouts.

We note that while the motion on this council file was introduced on March 21st, 2025 there are several written comments submitted that are dated before that, as early as February 2025; and many submitted after March 21st that are dated prior to March 21st in the document submitted as comment. The pattern of early submissions raises concerns about coordinated messaging not originating from independent community members.

We request Council Member Nithya Raman of District 4 remove her second on this motion. We request this item be withdrawn from consideration; we strongly urge a NO vote if this item is considered.

Thank you for your attention. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

With Pride and Determination—
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