



November 1, 2011

Mayor Jean Quan
City of Oakland
1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Third Floor
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Mayor Jean Quan,

The East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) is the largest free legal services provider in Alameda County, providing desperately-needed services in the areas of education, housing, welfare, health, homelessness, community re-entry, consumer debt, immigration and economic development to thousands of Oakland residents every year. The vast majority of our clients are low-income people of color. To keep our services free, agencies like ours rely on funding from a wide variety of sources, including grants from the City of Oakland. Every dollar that gets diverted away from those agencies and organizations upon which our clients rely represents real and immediate suffering. In this context, your decision on Tuesday, October 25, 2011 to import several hundred officers from wealthier police agencies to raid and dismantle the Occupy Oakland encampment represented a gross misallocation of the city's strained resources and a lack of sensitivity to the urgent concerns of the City's most vulnerable residents.

The decision to deploy several hundred police officers in riot gear to suppress a crowd of peaceful demonstrators was a mistake that led to well-documented instances of police brutality. The firing of tear gas, flash grenades, and other projectiles into a crowd caused needless trauma, both physical and psychological. Such police tactics contribute to misperceptions that Oakland is a violent city, and poison the relationship between the community and the police. This deterioration of trust negatively affects all of our work, as our clients fear approaching the police for crucial public safety issues. Ultimately, the perception that Oakland police engage in brutal tactics to suppress political demonstrators will make us all less safe.

In your statement to Occupy Oakland last Thursday, you pledged to work with the demonstrators. Collaboration can be the only just solution to the strife between City government and the community members participating in Occupy Oakland. For us, collaboration goes beyond simply recognizing the legitimate grievances of community members concerning the national economic crisis, but also recognizing their grievances against the City of Oakland. In particular we ask that you:



1. Permit the Occupation to continue its peaceable encampment in Frank Ogawa/Oscar Grant Plaza and provide what assistance they need to maintain the cleanliness and safety of the camp;
2. Instruct the police not to enforce curfews that might restrict that occupation. Forcible removal of community members will only lead to more violence, more wasted resources, and continue to negatively reflect on Oakland in the national spotlight. So long as you remain committed to expelling the demonstrators from the plaza after 10 p.m., no meaningful collaboration can take place;
3. Produce records of the use of force during the raid on the Occupation and the subsequent demonstrations – as the ACLU of Northern California and the National Lawyers Guild have requested – and conduct a full investigation that is transparent to the public;
4. Instruct Police Chief Jordan to prohibit from direct participation in crowd control all police officers whose use of force raised questions requiring investigation, until the investigation of the use of force is completed; and
5. Reach out to the Alameda County District Attorney and personally request that she drop all charges against protesters acting nonviolently on Tuesday, and that she thoroughly investigate all allegations of violence against persons or property, to determine whether they were the result of illegal conduct by the police.

In this time of political unrest and economic crisis, when our clients and the wider community are suffering from an economic and political system that is not serving their needs, there must be an outlet for the people's desire to organize and express their views. We at EBCLC support the desires of the Occupy Oakland movement to express their political views as well as the General Strike called for Wednesday, November 2, 2011, in which many members of our organization plan to participate. The opportunity still remains for the City to emerge from the disastrous attempt to repress Occupy Oakland and for the City to serve as a national example of a truly democratic community. It would be a tragedy to miss that opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tirien Steinbach".

Tirien Steinbach
Executive Director