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Groups seek stimulus funds for homeowners and job training

An assembly at Wilshire Boulevard Temple presses city officials to allocate money where it's most needed.

By Ruben Vives

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Hundreds of delegates from Los Angeles-area religious, labor and community organizations gathered Sunday at Wilshire Boulevard Temple to propose that federal stimulus funds go toward helping homeowners avoid foreclosure and improving job training programs.

The two-hour assembly organized by One LA-IAF, a network of congregations, schools, unions and other groups, was designed to press local political leaders to spend the federal money on issues that the organization considers the most pressing. Several City Council members attended the event.

Yvette Roland, of the Transfiguration Church, told the 700 attendees that at least 19,000 South Los Angeles residents have either lost their homes to foreclosure or are about to, a number that has jumped 60% since last year and doubled in some neighborhoods.

"There's no stimulus funding allocated in South Los Angeles to help out individuals and families before they're in foreclosure," Roland said.

Christina Yniguez, 41, took the stage to say she was laid off a year ago by a mortgage company and now faces foreclosure. "I am unable to hold onto to my family's home, but I'm very positive that with your continued assistance and support, I'll be able to rebuild," she said.

The delegates also called on city officials to devote millions from the stimulus package to expand job training efforts, rather than spending it on existing job-search services. They endorsed training programs such as the Hollywood Worksource Center, which this year lost most of the funding it received from the city. The center's funding has gone from \$1 million last year to \$250,000 this year, despite an 85% success rate in finding jobs for those who completed training, said Phillip Starr, the center's director.

"This is a unique gathering where such a diverse group -- Jews, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Asian, white, African Americans and Latinos -- comes together to address our public concerns," said One LA-IAF Co-Chairwoman Diane Vanette.

At the end of the assembly, delegates stood, clapped and shouted "yes" when they were asked if they were ready to take action.

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