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[Karen Bass' legacy at risk of repeating costly weakness on police reform, In LA and nationally](#)

By *[Robert Weiner](#)* and *[Tomas Alves](#)*

Amidst a tense day on May 1, 1992, Rodney King uttered his famous plea for Angelenos saying, "Can't we all get along?"

Mayor Bass, an organizer at the time, drew inspiration from the moment to organize Angeleno communities to fight for criminal justice reform with a specific emphasis on police accountability. But, Mayor Bass must not allow King's legacy to ring hollow, especially in her position as the most powerful person in the second-largest city in America.

In the 1990s, Mayor Bass, then a physician assistant, had hoped that her grassroots organization, Community Coalition in South Los Angeles, would invigorate enough voters to mobilize the cause of criminal justice reform in Los Angeles. In an appearance at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., which we hosted on July 16, 2020, Bass said she hoped that, "everything was going to change now because it was on video."

Carrying a formidable legislative record in Congress and being one of the fiercest House Members on the issue of criminal justice reform, Mayor Bass has not shown the same forceful pursuit in her time as Mayor. Her monumental decision to veto a July ballot measure that would allow progress on police accountability such as a provision allowing the LAPD chief to fire officers accused of misconduct, is misguided.

Four years ago, when Mayor Bass was known as Congresswoman Bass and Chair of the CBC, she championed multiple pieces of legislation on criminal justice reform that rode the wave of the Black Lives Matter movement and focused specifically on police accountability. As sponsor of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 she showed persistence and legislative acumen to get the bill through the House.

Despite that success, Bass faced roadblocks in the Senate and seemed to back away from the continued effort needed. She needed more comprehensive negotiations with the McConnell-designated Senate leader on the issue, Tim Scott (R-SC), and possibly compromise on police immunity -- maybe allow study grants in states-- in order to receive bans of no chokeholds, no knees-on-necks, no-knock intrusions, no rough rides, the required use of body cameras, vetting of prior records, and the like.

At her appearance to the National Press Club in Washington, then-Congresswoman Bass corrected then-Vice President, Lisa Matthews, when asked about the negotiations on the George Floyd bill with Senator Tim Scott saying, "There are no formal negotiations going on." Later Bass also mentioned that her colleagues, Senator Cory Booker and then-Senator Kamala Harris, "have the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act in the Senate," effectively abdicating herself from any further legislative advocacy. As a result,

Senate negotiations for the bill collapsed in September 2021. House Assistant Leader Jim Clyburn, the highest ranking Black House member, told MSNBC, "Don't blame us... We passed the bill. Ask the Senate."

Instead of playing hot potato with Senators Scott, Booker, and Harris, the CBC chair could have tried to persuade Senator Scott to listen to the collective position of the influential CBC or manufacture a compromise with Scott given that she only acknowledged Scott's counterproposal as, "a sincere effort, absolutely."

This is the mistake that Mayor Bass is in jeopardy of repeating with her July veto. While the ballot measure may have been rushed in its conception and proposal, critics have to ask: What is Mayor Bass' plan? By being so rushed to veto a proposal that could make progress for Angelenos and put the LAPD chief in the driver's seat, Bass chose a path of wishful thinking.

If Karen Bass is sincere about her resolve in making progress on criminal justice reform, she should not wait for the next Rodney King. Bass' legacy is at risk of repeating a costly weakness on police reform in LA and nationally.

Robert Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and George W. Bush White Houses. He was communications director of the House Government Operations Committee, and senior aide to Congressman John Conyers and Charles Rangel, Reps. Claude Pepper and Ed Koch, Sen. Ted Kennedy, and Four-Star General/ Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey.

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