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Tides Foundation Honors Aurea Montes-Rodriguez, Community Coalition's Vice President of Organizational Growth.

Award Recognizes Montes-Rodriguez's leadership as a community organizer "developing empowerment among South LA youth".

Los Angeles- Aurea Montes-Rodriguez, Vice President of Organizational Growth at Community Coalition, will accept the Jane Bagley Lehman Award for Excellence in Public Advocacy for her work around educational equity for Black and Brown youth in South LA. The award highlights the success of Aurea's strategic education action campaigns and how she's developed home grown leadership and empowered South LA youth.

Established in 1990, the Jane Bagley Lehman Award is a national honor given by the Tides Foundation to individuals who have exhibited a deep commitment to the public interest, whose work demonstrates unique and innovative approaches to social needs and problems, and who have sought to share their experiences and findings with the largest audience possible. This year's award specifically celebrates those who strive to ensure all levels of education are affordable, attainable and accessible.

Aurea was nominated by two community organizers who were inspired by working under her leadership at Community Coalition. "I feel humbled to have been nominated by stellar community organizers who I respect tremendously. And, I feel honored to represent Community Coalition as we work to improve the quality of education for all students in South LA, the future leaders of our community", said Montes-Rodriguez.

Community Coalition provides a vehicle for South LA residents to change the policies that impact their quality of life. The organization was founded in 1990 by Congresswoman Karen Bass to address South LA's crack cocaine epidemic. Community Coalition ensures that its members are at the forefront of its campaigns. Most recently, the Coalition's student-led Equity is Justice campaign pushed the LAUSD School Board to pass the Equity in Schools resolution, which distributes nearly \$1,000,000,000 to school's with the greatest need.

Aurea has a keen understanding of youth and community organizing. She served as a key figure in getting student and parent voices at Fremont High School- at that point the largest and most overcrowded high school in the district-heard by the LAUSD.

In 2009 Fremont high school, positioned in the heart of South L.A., housed 4,500 students in a facility designed to only hold 1,500. Further, Out of the whole school, only 45 tested proficient in math, while 2 students tested as advanced. Out of an incoming class freshman class of 2,000, only 500 graduated four years later and the rest were astonishingly "unaccounted" for.

"What was going on was unacceptable. We had a school that prepared the majority of our students for failure, not success", states Montes-Rodriguez.

Aurea worked with students and parents to develop the new Fremont community-school model. Her ability to bring together these critical stakeholders led to a plan called the *Community Recommendations for Fremont*, which created pathways to combat student dropout, while significantly improving student access to living wage careers and four-year college preparation. Aurea's organizing efforts paid off when then LAUSD Superintendent Ramon Cortines agreed to implement the *Community Recommendations*.

Currently, Aurea is a member of the Building Movement Project working to build capacity within the non-profit sector and bolster a stronger social justice movement at the national level. She is the Board Chair at InnerCity Struggle, an educational-justice organization in East Los Angeles. She is also the Co-Chair of the South LA Child Welfare Initiative, which seeks to improve the developmental outcomes for children 0-5 years in South LA and to reduce the risk of involvement with the foster care system.

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