

## **Speaker Emeritus Karen Bass**

Karen Bass was elected to the California State Assembly in 2004 to represent the 47th Assembly District. In May 2008, Bass made history when the Los Angeles Democrat became the 67th Speaker of the California Assembly. Bass is the first African American woman and the first Democratic woman to serve as Speaker of the California Assembly. Bass is also the first African American woman in the country to serve in the role of Speaker of a state Assembly. Prior to her election as Speaker, Bass served in Assembly leadership positions beginning in her first term when she was Majority Whip and as Majority Floor Leader in her second term.

As Speaker, Karen Bass is committed to helping California weather the tough economic times brought about by the national recession and global economic turmoil. Under Bass's leadership, the Assembly has passed legislation helping California receive federal funding to extend unemployment insurance benefits, helping unemployed Californians retain access to employer-sponsored health care, and jumpstarting infrastructure projects to create good paying jobs in the state.

Bass's legislation includes bills improving conditions and services for youth in California's foster care system; helping stop predatory lending practices and ensuring real estate industry accountability to consumers; working to reduce dropouts by expanding multiple pathways in high school to prepare students for college, career and civic responsibility; establishing the Firefighter Bill of Rights, and removing barriers to allowing low-risk offenders to return productively to the community.

Bass also wrote successful legislation extending the charter for Soledad Enrichment Action, which allows these charter schools serving at-risk youth in Los Angeles County to continue for another 10 years. Bass has also worked to protect California's vital motion picture and television industries, and has played a lead role in securing funding for Los Angeles Unified School District, the Baldwin Hills Conservancy and other civic and cultural projects in the Los Angeles area.

Awards received by Speaker Bass include: Ronald H. Brown Award from the National Child Labor Committee; Phoenix Award from the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation; Promenade of Distinction from the Trumpet Foundation; Johnnie L. Cochran Public Service Award from the Loyola Law School African American Alumni Association; California Civil Rights Hero by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing; Rosa Parks Award from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; FAME Award from the First African-Methodist Episcopal Church; Woman of the Year Award from 100 Black Men of Los Angeles.

Speaker Bass has taken a unique approach to involving her constituents in the legislative process. Bass created the 47th Assembly District People's Council, which is a volunteer group, composed of community leaders. The council itself is made up of four Commissions — Education, Environment, Small Business and Health — that engage people in issues that affect their families and communities. The Commissions also host events and activities in the district to provide up-to-date information to residents. Bass, who served as Vice-Chair

of the Legislative Black Caucus, also commissioned The State of Black California Report, a demographic profile of Black Californians that included a statewide organizing effort to involve the community in identifying its concerns and making legislative recommendations.

Before Speaker Bass began her political career, she was a community organizer who founded and ran the Community Coalition. As the organization's executive director, Bass built a community-based social justice organization in South Los Angeles to empower residents to get involved in bringing about change. Today, the organization is considered a model for energizing communities. Prior to her community organizing, Bass worked for almost a decade as a Physician Assistant and served as a Clinical Instructor at the USC Keck School of Medicine Physician Assistant Program.

Karen Bass grew up in the Venice/Fairfax area of Los Angeles. She is the only daughter of DeWitt and Wilhelmina Bass. Her father worked as a mail carrier and her mother, who once owned her own beauty salon, was a stay-at-home mother. Bass grew up with three brothers – two older and one younger. She is a true Los Angelino, graduating from Hamilton High School, Cal State Dominguez Hills, and the University of Southern California School of Medicine Physician Assistant Program.

Speaker Bass, who is divorced, had one daughter, Emilia Bass-Lechuga, son-in law Michael Wright and four step children. Emilia wanted to follow in her mother's footsteps and help others; Emilia's passion for life continues to be a motivation for Speaker Bass.

Speaker Bass represents Culver City, West Los Angeles, Westwood, Cheviot Hills, Leimert Park, Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, the Crenshaw District, Little Ethiopia and portions of Korea Town and South Los Angeles.