

March 31, 2021

The Honorable Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, Sr.
Chair, Assembly Committee on Public Safety
1020 N St., Room 111
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 333 (Kamlager) STEP Forward Act - SPONSOR

Dear Chair Jones-Sawyer,

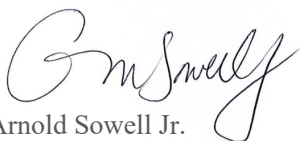
NextGen California respectfully requests your support of AB 333 (Kamlager), which takes an important step to reduce the harm caused by the increased application of gang enhancements in the sentencing process.

Gang enhancements were first enacted in 1988 to deter gang involvement and reduce gang violence. The original statutes increased sentences by three years when the crime committed was shown to be a gang-related offense. Since then, the use of gang enhancements has severely deviated from its intended purposes. Today, a much broader array of crimes are eligible for gang enhancements – including non-violent misdemeanors – and an enhancement can now lead to a life-sentence. This expansion in scope coupled with vague definitions and weak evidentiary standards has resulted in a devastatingly wide net being cast that has disproportionately affected entire communities. Further, the discriminatory application of gang enhancements is recognized as a key driver of the mass incarceration of people of color – over 90% of those with gang enhancements are people of color, although data proves that whites make up the largest group of youth gang members.

AB 333 will institute sensible reforms to the standards for how and when gang enhancements are applied. Specifically, it requires direct evidence of current/active gang involvement; narrows the set of eligible crimes; and bans the practice of using the current crime alone to establish the requisite “pattern” of gang activity.

NextGen California works to advance fair policies that ensure accountability while also reducing racial disparities in the state’s criminal justice system. For the above reasons, we respectfully request your “aye” vote on AB 333.

Sincerely,



Arnold Sowell Jr.

Executive Director, NextGen California