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February 28, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 205090

Dear President Obama,

I am writing to urge you to confer the Presidential Medal of Honor posthumously upon Fred Ross, Sr., in recognition of his lifetime commitment to the training and development of leaders and organizers throughout the United States. I first learned of Fred Ross, Sr. in 1972, when I began ministry in East Los Angeles. I'm a Catholic sister, and a member of the Sisters of Social Service of Los Angeles.

I began working in East LA as a parish social worker in the early 1970's, and soon encountered the stories and experiences that brought me to know and respect the work of Fred Ross, Sr. So many of the conversations I had with people in the neighborhoods, communities and churches in East LA were filled with stories of how their East LA communities overcame discrimination and voter suppression as a result of the organizing training they received from Fred Ross, Sr. I learned that Fred had been hired in 1947, by Saul Alinsky of the Industrial Areas Foundation, to come to East Los Angeles and work for the Community Services Organization (CSO). He trained thousands of local Latino leaders in East LA to organize, and taught organizing skills and strategies to many young activists like Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Eliseo Medina and Cruz Reynosa. Most of these many leaders, both local and national, went on to become champions for economic and social justice issues at home and all across the US.

It is in large part because of Fred Ross Sr.'s pioneering work in East LA, along with the respect and appreciation that his work inspired in those local ELA communities, that organizers from the Industrial Areas Foundation, including Ed Chambers and Ernesto Cortes, Jr., were welcomed into East LA in 1975, despite blatant opposition from many powerful forces. They began an organizing drive that led to the establishment of powerful broad-based IAF organizations beginning with UNO in East LA in 1978, SCOC in South Central LA in 1981, and VOICE in the San Fernando Valley in 1984. Because of the work that Fred Ross Sr. began in Los Angeles in the '40's and 50's, and continued until his death in 1992 in places all across the U.S., there is to this day a strong and lasting IAF organizing presence in Los Angeles through the organization One LA/IAF.

When I met Fred Ross Sr. in the late 1970's, I was struck by his quiet strength and deep respect for others, especially the common person. Although I never had the privilege of working with Fred directly, he influenced my decision to become an IAF organizer, a path I have continued to walk from 1978 through the present. I believe it would be fitting that Fred be recognized now, for all he contributed to helping others acknowledge and embrace their strength, their dignity and most importantly their responsibility to take action for the common good in our country. I urge you, President Obama, to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Fred Ross, Sr.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maribeth Larkin".

Sister Maribeth Larkin, SSS
Co-lead Organizer, One LA/IAF