

Wajeha Bilal: Honoring Rosa Parks through Community Advocacy and Action



Wajeha Bilal (2019 WTS-LA Rosa Parks Diversity Leadership Award winner), 2019

Rosa Parks knew what she was doing on that bus in 1965. And she knew that the consequences would be severe. But she also knew that despite the harsh personal retribution she would suffer, her actions had greater meaning. That belief serves as the focus of the WTS-LA Rosa Parks Diversity Leadership Award. Each year, the chapter bestows this award on someone who stands up for what's right, no matter what the consequences may be, one who shows absolute determination and ability to do what is right. This year, WTS-LA recognizes community activist Wajeha Bilal for being that person.

Dedicated passionately to her community, Bilal lives, works, and volunteers in her community of South Los Angeles. A member of Metro's NextGen Bus Study Working Group—an entity focused on providing guidance on the redesign of Metro's entire bus network—Bilal ensures that the concerns of her community have voice in the proceedings. A tireless advocate, she's a community leader who has contributed mightily and selflessly to promote public transportation for Hispanic and African-American families. She's also a "travel buddy" in Metro's *On the Move Riders Program*, reaching out to older adults to ease use and safety of mass transit. Additionally, she actively supports Metro's Rail Safety Ambassadors, who are assigned to observe and report issues along the rail system. For many, that would be enough. Not for Bilal.

In addition to her vital work in transportation, Bilal also facilitates outreach for the Watts Gang Task Force, advising residents on how to contact and interact with the LAPD and Transit Security to seek assistance. She is a Eureka Foundation alumni and Fellow for business training. She's also a CORO fellow—a highly esteemed program that develops emerging leaders—and uses her training to cultivate diverse, collaborative, cross-section outreach in her community. That includes mentoring Hispanic and African-American women on how to save and secure funding, dress for success, and obtain licenses and permits for small business.

Finally, Bilal founded the Build Plus Community Market Place. Located at the Metro Blue Line 103rd Street Station, the Build Plus Community Market Place is a non-profit that promotes the general welfare and economic development of low-income people in Watts. It has been internationally recognized as a model for this type of vital outreach. In addition, she also helped establish both state and national recognition for the Watts Towers.

For these reasons and many more, WTS-LA proudly names Wajeha Bilal as the 2019 WTS-LA Rosa Parks Diversity Leadership Award winner.

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