

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Panel: City is stifling its voice

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**Tuesday, September 23, 2003** - VALLEY GLEN -- Members of an advisory panel to speak for Valley Glen at Los Angeles City Hall say the panel is being undermined by the city department that is supposed to help it establish and have an election.

Officials at the city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment have knotted the Valley Glen Community Council in a web of confusing and seemingly arbitrary rules governing its election, according to some community council members.

Among other things, DONE officials are forcing the community council to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, forbidding it from requiring photographs of candidates in the election, and restricting whom the council may choose to oversee its election.

Members of the Valley Glen group complain that the city is tightening the reins to ensure that the group is subservient to the city rather than independent.

Their complaints echo comments from several of the approximately 100 official neighborhood councils in Los Angeles, which were set up under a 1999 charter reform measure intended to bring more representation to neighborhoods.

"I can't help but feel we're being punished for wanting to clarify things," said Diana Lipari, co-chairwoman of the Valley Glen Community Council's elections committee.

"They're trying to turn us into someone who is regulated by the city. That to me is a conflict (of interest)."

DONE officials acknowledge that they're holding Valley Glen to higher standards than many other neighborhood councils.

The Valley Glen Community Council triumphed over a rival group calling itself the College Center Neighborhood Council to win official recognition by the city last year.

But in agreeing to recognize the Valley Glen Community Council as the official advisory panel for the area, city officials insisted that the group reach out to all workers, college students, residents and property owners in the council's boundaries, said DONE General Manager Greg Nelson.

That has meant additional frustrations for the organizers of the Valley Glen group, Nelson acknowledged, but he said city officials aren't trying to control or thwart the panel.