

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS SHEILA KUEHL  
AND HILDA L. SOLIS

September 29, 2020

**Implementing Reentry Employment Support for AB 109 Fire Camp Participants**

On August 6, 2019, the Board unanimously passed a motion entitled “Exploring Reentry Employment Support for AB 109 Fire Camp Participants.” This motion recognized that Los Angeles County relies on the labor of incarcerated individuals to help fight our wildfires. They work under extremely dangerous conditions with little compensation at the Fire Camps. The purpose of that motion was to identify career pipelines for Fire Camp participants, following their release from custody, in the Los Angeles County Fire Department (Fire) or other County Departments. The Board has continuously shown a dedication to reducing recidivism and improving public safety by working to ensure that people have access to the services and supports they need to succeed. Fire Camp participants risk their lives to keep our residents safe. In return, the participants and the County would both benefit from providing a connection to gainful employment to help Fire Camp participants be successful upon their release from custody.

Our motion directed the Chief Executive Office (CEO) to work with Fire; the Sheriff’s Department; Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community

MOTION

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Services; and the Department of Human Resources to find ways to create employment linkages for Fire Camp participants, identify facilities that could be used for training programs, and identify funding opportunities. This motion further directed the CEO to examine the feasibility of sending people who were incarcerated locally to the State's Ventura Training Center (VTC). The VTC is an 18-month reentry program where people leaving state prison receive training on emergency response, firefighting, and resource conservation while receiving a monthly stipend and job placement assistance.

The CEO submitted their response to the Board on March 13, 2020, recommending that Fire work with the CEO and other County Departments to link Fire Camp participants with job training programs that could result in County employment. One of these job training programs is called Preparing Los Angeles County for Employment (PLACE). PLACE helps individuals with high barriers to employment, including justice-involved individuals, find permanent County career jobs. In its first year, PLACE helped fifty people obtain jobs with the Departments of Health Services, Beaches and Harbors, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works. The CEO also recommended that Fire continue to work with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to provide Fire Camp participants with post-release employment assistance for jobs with other fire-related organizations such as CAL FIRE, the California Conservation Corps, and the United States Forest Service.

CEO emphasized that the County lacks resources to build out a reentry program for Fire Camp participants. The use of AB 109 funding for this reentry program would require curtailments to existing programs because the money is fully allocated. The Board also directed CEO to reassess the AB 109 budget at the June 23, 2020 Board

meeting. (Supervisors Hahn and Solis, Reassessing AB 109 Community Corrections Funding). Fire does not have available funding in their budget to create a reentry program. Further, people on Probation in LA County are not eligible for the VTC at this time as the program is only available to people on parole, although CAL FIRE continues to explore the feasibility.

The CEO's report was submitted shortly before the world changed due to COVID-19. Not only did CEO project a \$935.3 million budget gap, but COVID-19 forced the entire state to rethink incarceration. LA County reduced the jail population by approximately 5,000 people as a preventive measure. In response to severe outbreaks of COVID-19 in our state prisons, CDCR stopped all movement between facilities and announced on July 10, 2019 that they plan to release an additional 8,000 people from prison. Because CDCR manages the populations at the County's Fire Camps, the number of people at our Fire Camps has significantly decreased and no new people are being transferred to these camps from the state prisons or county jails. In fact, the number of CDCR fire crews in LA County will likely reduce from 24 to approximately 8. This means that there will be significantly fewer crews for the same amount of work. The reduction in the number of fire crews coincided with a record-breaking fire season in California. Last year by late August, only "4,292 fires had burned 56,000 acres across the state." This year, however, over 7,000 fires have burned 1.4 million acres. California was forced to pull in resources and firefighters from as far as Kansas. (Jill Cowan, California Fires: Why This Year is Different, LA Times, August 25, 2020). These sudden changes present the County with an opportunity to develop robust employment support for Fire Camp participants. COVID-19 has taught the County that we cannot and should not rely on prison labor to fight our wildfires. Moving forward, the County should

continue to focus on how to provide Fire Camp participants with job training, career mentoring, and connections to career opportunities within the County, including with Fire.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct:

1. The Chief Executive Office (CEO) and the Fire Department (Fire) to work with the Department of Human Resources (DHR), the Preparing Los Angeles for County Employment (PLACE) Program, the Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services (WDACS), the Probation Department (Probation), the Sheriff's Department, IAFF Local 1014 Union, and other community organizations, as appropriate, to:
  - a. Connect Fire Camp participants to the PLACE program and to other fire agencies in a significant way, including information sessions, materials, phone calls, emails, letters of recommendation, and more;
  - b. Explore ways to gain access to internet and other programming at the Fire Camps;
  - c. Work with Community Outreach, Recruitment, Diversity, and Inclusion (CORDI) to create an outreach program targeted at the Fire Camp reentry population that is similar to the recruitment programs that already exist for women and Veterans;
  - d. Develop pathways to employment for former Fire Camp participants as Fire Suppression Aids or as another similar or new classification, including but not limited to a student or seasonal worker, in Fire that reduce barriers to employment to fill vacancies caused by COVID-19 and to continue into the future;

- e. Work with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to develop protocols to resume admissions to the Fire Camps during the pandemic as soon as it is safe for participants and staff; and
  - f. Report back to the Board in 60 days and every 60 days thereafter with a progress report on the implementation of the above directives.
- 2. The CEO and Fire to work with DHR, Probation, WDACS, the Department of Public Works, IAFF Local 1014 Union, and other community organizations to develop multiple options for a pilot reentry job training program in LA County that is similar to the Ventura Training Center and submit a proposal with a cost analysis and potential funding sources for each option to the Board in 60 days.
- 3. The Office of County Counsel to assist with the implementation of Assembly Bill 2147 (2020) by:
  - a. Working with Fire, the Public Defender, the Alternate Public Defender, and the District Attorney to create a procedure for certifying to the Los Angeles Superior Court that Fire Camp participants successfully completed the program while incarcerated so their records can be expunged per Penal Code 1203.4b in AB 2147; to identify the number of current and past participants who may be eligible for this relief; and develop a process for notifying current and past participants of this relief;
  - b. Working with the CEO, Fire, and DHR to provide recommendations to fully implement AB 2147 in LA County, including a description of any remaining barriers, even after expungement, that formerly incarcerated individuals may face in becoming certified Emergency Medical Technicians in the State of California; and

- c. Reporting back to the Board in 60 days on their progress.
- 4. The CEO-Legislative Affairs to support the Fire Camp Program by:
  - a. Establishing eligibility in the State's Ventura Training Center reentry program for people sentenced under AB 109 in Los Angeles County who participated in the Fire Camp program while incarcerated;
  - b. Advocating for funding from the State to ensure that the Fire Department is fully compensated for their work with CDCR's Fire Camp Program;
  - c. Advocating for funding to start a local reentry fire program; and
  - d. Advocating for other resources, funding, and access as needed.