

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER AND
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An Assessment of Challenges and Opportunities in the Los Angeles County Fire Department

The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) provides critical life-saving fire and emergency medical services to approximately 4 million residents across 59 cities and 122 unincorporated areas of the County and the City of La Habra. The LACoFD is responsible for fire prevention and protection of residential and commercial structures and nearly 2,311 square miles of land including beaches, mountain ranges and more. The LACoFD also manages a robust lifeguard program, urban search and rescue, homeland security assistance, hazardous materials response, and the Baby Safe Surrender and Safe House programs. Finally, the LACoFD is a nationally recognized and acclaimed fire agency that is regularly called upon to assist with wildfires in other jurisdictions.

The LACoFD is a special district and is not funded by the County general fund. Instead, it is principally funded through property tax, a special tax approved by voters in 1997 levied on real property. As of the Fiscal Year 2022-23 Final Adopted Budget, LACoFD's annual budget is \$1.592 billion and they operate 177 fire stations with nearly 5,000 budgeted personnel.

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Due to numerous factors, the LACoFD's expenditures have begun to exceed revenue. This gap has been closed each year with one-time revenue including the use of LACoFD's Reserves. LACoFD's latest projections show that it will exhaust its Reserves by FY 2024-25. The increase in costs has been exacerbated by various operational and programmatic issues.

The operational issues are primarily due to workers compensation liability and the increase in the number of employees who are injured and on leave. About 80% of the LACoFD's budget is dedicated to salaries and employee benefits (including overtime). LAFCoD currently has 496 staff out on injury claims. More than half of those individuals have been out longer than 90 days. The high number of vacancies as a result of injury and illness is placing undue stress on the remaining Fire personnel who are on callbacks which is negatively impacting the fiscal health of the Department that must fill behind employees by paying overtime. Those injured and on leave also need a robust system that supports their treatment and care so they can return to work as quickly as possible. This is a complex issue involving multiple factors and stakeholders, including the County's Chief Executive Officer, the Department of Human Resources, the Third-Party Workers' Compensation Administrator, Sedgwick, and labor partners. However, this is an issue that must be addressed to successfully manage the structural deficit of the Department. Additionally, the Department must identify opportunities to strengthen the pool of candidates to ensure that the most physically skilled are eligible for employment, thus mitigating injuries to the extent possible for newly hired firefighters.

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In addition to operational issues, the LACoFD is also facing programmatic changes that have impacted its ability to effectively manage resources and staff. The vast majority of the calls for service to LACoFD are for medical calls – a staggering 84% of all the 9-1-1- calls to Fire last year. In January 2022, the LACoFD hit an all-time high of responding to more than 40,000 calls for service which averaged to about 1,300 calls per day. This increase has put a strain on the Department's resources – yet these calls are a matter of life and death for millions of residents.

The County cannot allow the operational and programmatic issues facing the LACoFD to impact its ability to protect lives, property, and the environment with prompt, skillful, and cost-effective fire protection, and life safety services. We must act now to ensure financial sustainability while we simultaneously address the operational and programmatic changes necessary for the Department.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to work with the Los Angeles County Fire Department, the Department of Human Resources, and labor partners and report back to the Board in 45 days in writing on the following:

- 1) An assessment of the challenges inherent with the current Workers' Compensation system, and recommendations to improve and strengthen the system to help employees return to work in a safe and timely manner. This should include an overview of best practices from other jurisdictions, potential issues with the state system, a review of the current Third-Party Administrator and any other impacts that are exacerbating excessive leave and Disability Management and Compliance issues;

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- 2) An overview of the current training and hiring practices including an assessment of recruitment practices, the “Recruit Academy” with recommendations on how to enhance the pool of candidates eligible for hire by the Department, and opportunities to provide ongoing training to maintain the wellness, skills, and abilities of fire personnel; and,
- 3) An assessment of existing resources that can address the current budget deficit to support the personnel and infrastructure needs while exploring options for alternative, sustainable funding for the Department to fulfill its emergency and life-saving services.

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