



CONFIRE

STAFF REPORT

DATE: February 28, 2024

FROM: Nathan Cooke, Interim Director

**BY: Damian Parsons, Finance/Administrative Director
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TO: CONFIRE Administrative Committee

**SUBJECT: Addition of Regular Status Positions to Move Emergency
Communication Nurse System Positions from Contract to
Permanent Positions**

Recommendation

Authorize the addition of five (5) positions to change the (4) existing Emergency Communication Nurse positions as well as the (1) existing Emergency Communications Nurse Manger positions from contract status to full-time permanent positions.

Background Information

On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was signed into law by the President. The law is intended to assist, but limited to, public health and economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of the Emergency Communications Nurse System (ECNS) program occurred December 21, 2020, through a contractual agreement with Regional Emergency Medical Services Agency (REMSA) to provide California licensed nurses who were Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) trained in LowCode to screen certain low acuity calls and direct them to appropriate treatment or transportation options.

As an accredited center for Emergency Medical Dispatch, Consolidated Fire Agencies (CONFIRE) can operate its Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) program to incorporate a nurse element. Utilizing nurses with CONFIRE's expanded dispatch capabilities mitigates unnecessary ambulance transports and emergency room (ER) visits by providing immediate, professional nursing care to individuals in their homes or community settings and sometimes arrange for other modes of transportation to non-emergency medical facilities. This approach not only alleviates the strain on our emergency services but also ensures that patients receive timely and appropriate care in the most suitable environment.

The ARPA Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CLFRF) has allowed CONFIRE to hire contract nurses and expand the program to provide 24-hour coverage, 7 days a week including additional staffing for peak periods of high call volume. Unfortunately, because the nurses are on a contract and not permanent employees of CONFIRE, it has been very difficult to retain and recruit qualified ECN's and a nurse manager.

On February 8, 2022, the County Board of Supervisors and the San Bernardino County Fire District entered into an agreement regarding the transfer of ARPA CLFRF, which is being utilized by CONFIRE for ECNS expenditures. The ARPA funding is set to run out as of December 1, 2024. CONFIRE has requested additional ARPA funding from the County to secure funding for the program through December 2026.

CONFIRE Staff are also working on securing funding from the Payors (insurance companies) to help offset staffing costs. It is estimate that the payors will provide 50% of the overall funding for the program moving forward. The annual estimated costs for the ECNS program are \$1.8 million.

Fiscal Impact

The estimated annual fully encumbered costs for the (4) ECN's and the (1) Nurse Manger is \$791,746. The CONFIRE Board of Directors previously approved this amount in the FY 24-25 annual budget with the costs being paid for by the ARPA funding.

If CONFIRE cannot secure additional ARPA funding and/or funding from the payors, it is recommended that funds from 5020 (EMS) be used and if those funds do not materialize, it is recommended that 5008 (Operations) be used to fund the ECNS program for the remainder of the FY 24-25 budget. Staff will return to the Administrative Committee to make a formal request for funding.