



CONFIRE

STAFF REPORT

DATE: August 27, 2024

FROM: Nathan Cooke, Interim Director

BY: Damian Parsons, Finance/Administration Director

TO: CONFIRE Administrative Committee

SUBJECT: Addition of Regular Status Positions to Change Emergency Communication Nurse System Positions from Contract to Permanent Positions and Funding Plan

Recommendation

1. Authorize the addition of five (5) new positions, four (4) Emergency Communication Nurse positions and one (1) Emergency Communications Nurse Manager position to convert Emergency Communication Nurse System staffing from contract positions to full-time permanent regular status positions.
2. Approve the proposed funding plan for the Emergency Communication Nurse System program for the last six months of the fiscal year and subsequent years.

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 requested additional ARPA funding from the County to secure funding for the program through December 2026 but was denied due to all ARPA funds being already earmarked for other projects.

Per the Ground Ambulance contract #23-1282 with San Bernardino County CONFIRE is required to have the ECNS program. CONFIRE staff has developed the following funding plan to cover the \$1.6 million a year needed to provide ECNS:

1. Seek to obtain 100% of program costs from the Payers, who in the healthcare industry are organizations, entities or people that pay for services from healthcare providers.
2. Seek to obtain the remaining balance after the Payers from other funding streams provided by San Bernardino County, the State, the Federal Government, or other sources.
3. Fund the balance of remaining costs from CONFIRE Emergency Medical Services revenues, subject to revenues materializing to meet existing expenditure obligations and contract requirements, or through the revenue (approx. \$900,000 annually) that would be received from AMR via the \$5 per call for EMD services provided by CONFIRE, if they remain as the County ambulance provider.
4. If needed, fund the remaining balance from CONFIRE agencies based on the existing Call Volume metric currently utilized to recover other CONFIRE costs.

Fiscal Impact

The estimated annual fully encumbered costs for the (4) nurses and the (1) nurse manager is \$1.3 million. The CONFIRE Board of Directors previously approved this amount in the 2024-25 budget with the costs being paid for by the ARPA funding through December 2024.

CONFIRE will utilize the above funding plan to cover the estimated \$896,000 shortfall for 2024-25 and the annual \$1.6 million in costs for ECNS in future years.