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401 East Chapman Avenue – Placentia, California 92870

August 30, 2022

Honorable Erick Larsh, Presiding Judge
Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

SUBJECT: Response to Grand Jury Report Entitled “Where’s the Fire?” Stop Sending Fire Trucks to Medical Calls

Dear Honorable Judge Larsh:

Please accept this letter as the City of Placentia’s response to the Grand Jury’s report entitled “*Where’s the Fire?*” *Stop Sending Fire Trucks to Medical Calls*. This report was presented to the City Council at their meeting of September 6, 2022, whereby the City Council authorized the City Administrator to deliver the City’s response to the Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court on behalf of the Placentia City Council. Here are the City’s responses:

FINDINGS:

F1. Despite fire departments throughout Orange County having evolved into emergency medical departments, most have not updated their emergency response protocols accordingly, but have simply absorbed emergency medical responses into their existing fire response models.

City’s Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F3. ALS staffed ambulances or smaller squad vehicles are often the most appropriate response to medical calls and do not compromise the quality of medical care.

City’s Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F4. There has been a breakdown of communication and trust between OCEMS and Orange County Fire Chiefs.

City’s Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F5. Over-deployment of firefighters for medical calls contributes to the current climate of forced hiring and firefighter fatigue.

City's Response: The City does not agree or disagree with this finding as the City's service model is not experiencing these issues with its firefighters. The City's service model does not require forced hiring and the City's firefighters do not suffer from fatigue as a result.

F9. OCEMS has the authority to and responsibility to inspect all for-profit ambulances operating in Orange County; however publicly owned ambulances are not automatically subject to OCEMS oversight.

City's Response: The City agrees with this finding as it is the City's understanding that pursuant to Orange County Ambulance Ordinance 3517 and OCEMS Policy 720.40, the Orange County Healthcare Agency is the responsible entity that establishes the standard for inspections of ground ambulance providers conducted by OCEMS staff members. Neither the ordinance or the policy differentiates between public and privately owned ground ambulance providers. To the City's knowledge, the County has not inspected publicly owned ambulances since 2011.

F10. Placentia's changes to the emergency medical response protocols after leaving OCFA have resulted in improved medical response times.

City's Response: The City agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1. As recommended in the 2012 and 2014 OCFA Standards of Coverage and Deployment Plans, as well as other studies, the Grand Jury recommends that, by 2024, all Orange County fire agencies utilize criteria-based dispatch protocols and send a single unit response to those incidents triaged as non-life-threatening (BLS). F1, F2, F5.

City's Response: The City agrees with this recommendation as Placentia already adopted criteria-based-dispatch protocols utilizing Priority Dispatch software prior to the launch of its new service model. The dispatch protocols have been reviewed and approved by the County Medical Director. The County Medical Director, pursuant to the State Health and Safety Code, maintains the authority, medical control, and the responsibility to approve an agency's proposed dispatch protocols and medical triage.

R4. While OCEMS should recognize how certain policy changes may pose operational challenges to emergency responders in the field, fire leadership should recognize and respect the independent oversight authority and expertise of OCEMS. F4.


City's Response: The City agrees with this recommendation. The California EMS Act of 1980 created the California EMS Authority and enshrined in the Health and Safety Code (1797.100) a two-tiered system of State regulations of EMS services. Within that act, Local EMS Authorities (LEMSAs) as the second tier of the system, were created and empowered at the County level to design, evaluate, and oversee all provisions of EMS services within the geographic region of the County, which includes the EMS services provided by both public and private EMS providers.

R5. Departments with publicly owned ambulances should allow OCEMS to inspect their ambulances for compliance with State EMS guidelines and adopt OCEMS recommendations.

City's Response: The City agrees with this recommendation. The ambulances used by the City's contracted 911/ALS paramedic service provider are inspected annually by OCEMS pursuant to OCEMS Policy 720.40. In the best interest of the public's safety all ambulances operating in the County, public and private, should be inspected every year. OCEMS should exercise its statutory obligations to ensure that all ambulance service providers meet the same safety and regulatory requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your request. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (714) 993-8171.

Sincerely,


Rhonda Shader
Mayor

cc: Placentia City Council
City Administrator
Fire Chief