



# CITY OF FOUNTAIN VALLEY

CITY HALL 10200 SLATER AVENUE FOUNTAIN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA 92708

THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

(714) 593-4403 FAX: (714) 593-4494

Mayor:  
John J. Collins

Mayor Pro Tem:  
Mark McCurdy

Council Members:  
Larry Crandall  
Steve Nagel  
Michael Vo

City Manager:  
Raymond H. Kromer

City Attorney:  
Alan L. Burns

August 21, 2012

The Honorable Thomas J. Borris  
Presiding Judge  
Orange County Superior Court  
700 Civic Center Drive, West  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

RE: Grand Jury Report: *Emergency Medical Response in Orange County.*

Dear Judge Borris:

Fountain Valley City Council, along with the City Manager's Office and the Fire Department has reviewed the 2011-2012 Orange County Grand Jury report, *Emergency Medical Response in Orange County*. The City of Fountain Valley is providing the following response, in accordance with California Penal Code Section 933.05 (a) and (b).

### **Findings/Conclusions**

**F1.** *Fire departments that once primarily responded to calls for fire emergencies now have become emergency medical response departments primarily responding to medical emergencies. This evolution has occurred since the onset of "9-1-1" call where all emergency calls are received at one place.*

### **The City of Fountain Valley wholly disagrees with this finding/conclusion.**

Fountain Valley Fire Department began serving the community in July, 1964. Since its inception, the Fountain Valley Fire Department's mission has been to "provide the highest quality fire protection, emergency service and support to the community". This always included the provision of emergency medical services to citizens and visitors to our City. During the first full year of operation, Fountain Valley Fire Department responded to 125 fire calls, 120 medical/rescue emergencies and 19 "other" types of calls. This illustrates that from the beginning, Fountain Valley Fire Department responded to more non-fire calls than fire calls and that providing first aid or medical care has always been a primary function of the department.

By 1971, requests for medical emergency response from Fountain Valley Fire Department exceeded requests for fire suppression related response. In accordance with the City of Fountain Valley's goal of affording the community with high quality

public safety services, the City Council directed that the Fountain Valley Fire Department be responsible for providing paramedic services, beginning in March 1975. The Fire Department has continuously provided paramedic services to our community ever since. In 2011, Fountain Valley responded to 5,068 calls for help, of which 85% were medical related.

The assertion that the delivery of emergency medical services (EMS) as a primary responsibility of the fire department did not occur until after the implementation of the 9-1-1 system is also not correct. The 9-1-1 system did not become operational in Fountain Valley until 1985, whereas the delivery of emergency medical services has always been a primary responsibility of the Fountain Valley Fire Department.

*F2. As the fire departments evolved into emergency medical departments, the model for operating the fire departments has not radically changed. The fire departments have simply absorbed the emergency medical responses into their departments under their old "fire response" model.*

**The City of Fountain Valley partially disagrees with this finding/conclusion.**

While it is true that the model for operating Fountain Valley Fire Department has not *radically* [emphasis added] changed, that is because the model was purposefully designed to deliver all-risk emergency services from its inception in 1964. Apparatus, equipment, fire station locations and staffing were planned to enable the Fire Department to respond quickly throughout the City to deal with medical emergencies, rescue situations, hazardous situations, as well as fire suppression.

The Fire Department's initial first aid and inhalator services were the best level of care possible in the 1960's, but were rudimentary by today's standards. The California fire service led the effort in 1969 and 1970 to implement paramedic programs throughout the state. In 1970, the Wedworth-Townsend Paramedic Act was signed into law, establishing the parameters for implementing paramedic programs. The Orange County Fire Chiefs' Association developed a master plan for paramedic services in Orange County<sup>1</sup> in 1974. This document served as the guide in the development of a planned, strategic and seamless countywide fire service based paramedic delivery system. This document also set-forth responsible entities for critical support of the paramedic system, including the County Health Department, County Communications Department, base hospitals, receiving hospitals and teaching institutions. In the "Forward" section of the document it states "*While it is agreed that the approach contained herein represents a complete demarcation from traditional service methodology, it is nonetheless valid to the task at hand and remains highly responsive to citizen demand for optimum service at reasonable levels of expenditure.*" Fountain Valley's Fire Department was part of this countywide system, and the City's paramedic program was implemented in 1975. The emergency medical services system delivered by Fountain Valley Fire Department and other fire departments in Orange County did not "evolve," it was premeditated and thoughtfully designed to efficiently provide outstanding care to the sick and injured.

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<sup>1</sup> Master Plan Fire Protection Services Emergency Medical Services Element (Paramedics). Orig. 22 February 1974, Rev. 1 May 1976. Master Plan Committee, Orange County Fire Chiefs' Association.

Fountain Valley Fire Department made calculated refinements in its emergency medical service delivery system over the last 47 years. Paramedic services were added to the advanced first aid services delivered by the Fire Department in 1975. Initially, the basic life-support medical services delivered by engine companies were backed-up by paramedic firefighters who responded in a small medic "squad" unit. All non-paramedic firefighters were trained beyond advanced first aid to become level-one emergency medical technicians.

In 1995, Fountain Valley's Fire Chief doubled the advanced life-support (ALS) coverage in the City by re-assigning paramedic firefighters from the medic squad to the engine companies. Both engine companies were designated as an ALS paramedic unit. This provided the public with a faster paramedic response and eliminated the costs of purchasing, operating and maintaining an additional fire department unit (the medic squad). The Department's ladder truck company was upgraded to become a paramedic assessment unit in 2003, to better meet service demands.

The City of Fountain Valley has always contracted for ambulance transportation services with private ambulance companies. In 1998, the City again improved the delivery of emergency medical services and secured a source of EMS financing through a public-private partnership with Care Ambulance Service. In addition to providing emergency ambulance service for the City, the company began handling medical billing services for the Fire Department.

As late as February 2012, the Fountain Valley Fire Department was still making changes in its delivery system for the benefit of the public. On February 25, 2012, Fountain Valley Fire Department's ladder truck company was upgraded to deliver full ALS paramedic service along with the engine companies. This latest enhancement improves paramedic response times during peak call load periods.

*F3. Economic recessions have forced local fire department board of directors and city councils to re-evaluate their models for providing fire and emergency medical response. While this brings to the fore issues of staffing, response times, public safety, training, consolidations, union rules and privatization of their various services, it also spotlights the model used for all emergency responses.*

**The City of Fountain Valley agrees with this finding/conclusion.**

During the past several years of economic recession, the City of Fountain Valley studied and implemented numerous methods to reduce costs, while striving to maintain quality services for the public. Many of these actions were difficult and the Fire Department has not been immune from organizational changes and reductions designed to reduce costs. Management and support positions in the fire department have been eliminated, a two-tier retirement system has been implemented and the firefighters' union was the first public safety bargaining group to agree to pay all of the employee's contributions into the retirement system.

For many years the City of Fountain Valley has participated in multiple fire service related joint powers authorities to provide dispatch, training and hazardous materials response services, in order to maximize fiscal and operational efficiency. As another cost control measure the City belongs to the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority (CJPIA) and is piloting a CJPIA

program to conduct ongoing legal review of fire department operating policies and general orders.

As noted in the response to **F2** (above), the City of Fountain Valley has partnered with Care Ambulance Service, a private entity, to provide ambulance transportation services in our City. Through this public-private affiliation, the City also receives EMS billing services, thereby reducing its internal support costs.

The City is committed, however, not to degrade the level of public safety provided to the community. After a two-year exploration of out-sourcing fire department services or consolidating emergency response capabilities with other agencies, the City of Fountain Valley determined that none of these options created sufficient savings without reductions in service levels. Through these examinations it has become clear that Fountain Valley Fire Department's service model is the most effective and efficient for our community and constituents, for the foreseeable future.

### **Recommendations**

***R1.** The city fire departments and the Orange County Fire Authority should engage independent private consultants to re-evaluate their models for providing response for both fire and medical emergencies. These re-evaluations should include the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of current models and alternative models. This re-evaluation should be accomplished by July 31, 2013.*

**This recommendation will not be implemented by the City of Fountain Valley because it is not warranted and not reasonable.**

The City of Fountain Valley continually assesses the service components and capabilities of all its departments, including the Fire Department. This is completed by the professional City staff. Evidence of this process is the numerous modifications, made to the Fire Department's organizational structure, service delivery model and financing methods enacted over many years.

Multiple independent consultant studies of fire department service delivery systems were procured by several Orange County cities during the last few years.<sup>2</sup> None of these studies recommended significant changes to the fire service based paramedic delivery system in Orange County. Additionally, over the last two years, the City of Fountain Valley studied outsourcing and consolidation of its fire and EMS services, which served to demonstrate that the current organizational structure and delivery model of the Fire Department is both highly proficient and fiscally sensible.

For these reasons, the City of Fountain Valley believes that it would be an imprudent use of tax dollars to conduct yet another expensive study of what has already been determined to be a highly efficient and effective system for our City. Nevertheless, the City remains committed to continuous review of all aspects of its various service delivery systems.

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<sup>2</sup> Studies conducted for the cities of Anaheim, Fullerton, Newport Beach and Orange.



***R2.** Suggested alternative models should include forming a unified Emergency Response Department that includes fire and medical response, separating the fire response from the medical response, privatizing the emergency medical response, etc.*

**This recommendation will not be implemented by the City of Fountain Valley because it is not warranted and not reasonable.**

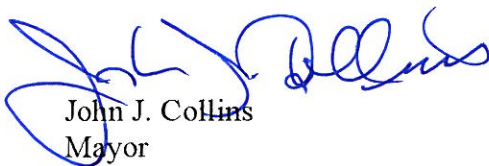
Fountain Valley Fire Department is already an “emergency response department that includes fire and medical response.” Although it is titled “fire department,” the organization’s service delivery model was designed from the outset, in 1964, to be an all-risk emergency response agency. The emergency medical services system in Fountain Valley already contains a privatized element, Care Ambulance Service. The City and Care Ambulance work together through a public-private partnership to deliver outstanding paramedic and emergency ambulance transport service in a cost-effective manner for the public.

Numerous consultant studies, both locally and across the nation have concluded that emergency medical care delivered by cross-trained multi-disciplinary firefighters, from existing strategically located fire stations is the most cost-effective way for communities to deliver optimal in-field EMS. Cities have a duty to provide fire suppression services. To add separate staff, equipment and vehicles to deliver paramedic services in Fountain Valley would only cause a large increase in operating cost to the system, which would be passed to the taxpayers or ambulance rate payers. In fact, a study completed by Care Ambulance Service in 2012<sup>3</sup> found that it would increase the cost per patient by over \$500 for their company to assume the role of paramedic services from the Fire Department. The number of paramedic units stationed in Fountain Valley would also be reduced from three to only two.

For these reasons, the City of Fountain Valley believes that it would be an imprudent use of tax dollars to conduct yet another expensive study to look at two options that already exist and a third that is not fiscally sound for the consumer. As noted previously, however, the City does continuously evaluate all of its service delivery methods and will continue this practice.

Thank you for providing the City of Fountain Valley the opportunity to respond and offer additional facts regarding the provision of emergency medical services in our City.

Sincerely,



John J. Collins  
Mayor

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<sup>3</sup> Fountain Valley Fire Department and Care Ambulance Service “A Working Partnership”. Care Ambulance Service. 2012.