



CITY OF ORANGE

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October 1, 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:

On behalf of the City of Orange, I am responding to 2011-2012 Orange County Grand Jury report, *Emergency Medical Response in Orange County*. The City of Orange is providing the following response, in accordance with California Penal Code Section 933.05 (a) and (b).

FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS:

Finding #1:

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 Orange partially disagrees with this finding - The City of Orange does not agree that implementation of our 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) in the 1980's is directly correlated to the increase in medical incident responses versus fire incident responses. The Orange City Fire Department placed its first paramedic unit in service in August 1973. Finding #1 ignores the first fifteen years of the evolution of modern EMS. Prior to 1973, Federal and State legislation had authorized paramedic programs, created EMS systems, set standards for firefighter first aid and EMT training. Finding #1 also ignores the advent and evolution of CPR, advances in science, technology, and medicine that increased the level of care our firefighters could provide before the patient reached the hospital.

Implementation of our PSAP, more than a decade after Paramedic Unit 5-1 was initially put in service, streamlined the public's access to emergency services. Requests for medical aid responses would not have steadily increased, over a span of more than twenty-five years, unless the needs of the calling party were being met. Additionally,

numerous other factors contribute to the public's access to emergency medical care. Some of these causes include: rapid access to care, lack of insurance, over-crowded emergency departments, population increases, aging of the population and a multitude of other factors.

Finding #2:

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 Orange agrees partially with this finding - While the City of Orange has not radically changed the model for operating the Fire Department, specific adjustments to its response model have been made over the years. Nevertheless, the model is purposefully designed to deliver all-risk emergency services through strategically located deployment which allows for quick response time from multifunctional personnel.

The California fire service led the effort in 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 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. The Orange City Fire Department was one of the initial participants of this countywide system. The emergency medical services system delivered by the 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.

As late as August 2011, the Orange City Fire Department was still making changes to its delivery system for the benefit of the public. This included redistributing three of the on-duty medics to form paramedic teams (two medics) in the three ambulances. This resulted in better partnership, increased mentoring, and reduced the need to deploy multiple engines to a medical aid call.

Finding #3:

Economic recessions have forced local fire department boards of directors and city councils to re-evaluate their models for providing fire and emergency medical responses. 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 Orange agrees partially with this finding - During the past several years of economic recession, the City of Orange 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. Among the changes in the Fire Department included cross-staffing the Urban Search and Rescue ("US&R") squad with an engine.

Over the years the City and the Fire Department have engaged in multiple evaluations of fire and emergency medical service delivery models, apparatus configurations, response times, staffing and deployment. As a result, over the years a multitude of changes have been suggested, considered, implemented, and deployed.

Fire dispatch and training centers were merged with other jurisdictions decades ago. In 2004, the City of Orange hired Emergency Services Consulting, Inc. to conduct a Fire Station Location and Deployment analysis. The 2008 Lewis Report contained eleven recommendations for changes to our fire based EMS system. Recommendations included the use of non-firefighter ambulance operators to staff fire department ambulances. In 2010, the City hired Ralph Anderson & Associates to further study proposed changes to the City's EMS system. Citygate Associates LLC completed a Consolidation, Merger, or Contract Fire Services Feasibility Study in January 2012 for the cities of Orange, Anaheim, and Fullerton. City Managers and Fire Chief's continue to evaluate the report and discuss future steps.

Further, the Orange City Fire Department is an active participant in a Countywide EMS system that was developed over forty years through deliberate, well-planned, collaborative efforts on the part of involved parties throughout Orange County. The constituents worked together to build a system that has always had one goal – what is best for the patients. Our EMS system is well known throughout California for the ability of its participants to work together to achieve that goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation #1:

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 has been implemented - Citygate Associates LLC completed a Consolidation, Merger, or Contract Fire Services Feasibility Study in January 2012 for the cities of Orange, Anaheim, and Fullerton. City Managers and Fire Chief's continue to evaluate the report, discuss and implement future steps.

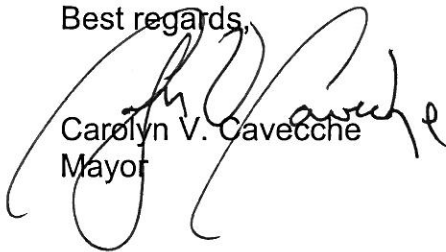
Recommendation #2:

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 because it is not warranted and not reasonable - The Orange City Fire Department currently uses a unified fire, medical and emergency response model. Numerous consultant studies, both locally and across the nation have concluded that emergency response, delivered by cross-trained multi-disciplinary firefighters, from existing strategically located fire stations is the most cost-effective way for communities to deliver optimal emergency services to the community. The 2008 Lewis Report and subsequent Ralph Anderson & Associates report supported the fact that separating and privatizing the emergency medical response in Orange is not economically feasible based on current operational standards. Further, the reports concluded that privatizing the emergency medical response may increase out of pocket expenses to the end user.

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

Best regards,



Carolyn V. Cavecche
Mayor