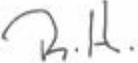


Date: August 22, 2022

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Reginald Harrison, Director, Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: Update on 9-1-1 Communications Center Operations

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The City of Long Beach's (City) Emergency Communications Center (9-1-1 Center) serves the community by linking residents with Police, Fire, and/or Emergency Medical Services. Given the time-sensitive nature of the 9-1-1 Center's activities, call takers and dispatchers are required to effectively communicate with callers while maintaining the safety of the City's first responders. Our dispatchers do a tremendous job of answering a high volume of phone calls while demonstrating professionalism and dedication as "the calming voice in the midst of the storm".

### **Call Volume**

The 9-1-1 Center, which includes Police and Fire Communications, has a budget of \$9.6 million that includes 78 budgeted personnel responsible for 9-1-1 call taking, radio dispatching and administrative functions. Currently, 61 of the 78 budgeted positions in the Emergency Communications Division are filled, and hiring efforts continue. Last year, the 9-1-1 Center received 704,692 calls for Police, Fire and Emergency medical services, which equates to a little over 80 calls per hour. In this region, only Los Angeles City and County answer more calls per year than Long Beach. Dispatchers answered, on average, 80 percent of those calls within 15 seconds; more than 275,000 of which were dispatched to first responders to render assistance.

In recent years, dispatchers have received a consistently increasing number of non-emergency calls, and in 2021, 60 percent of all calls received were for non-emergency services. In response to this influx, earlier this year the department implemented a non-emergency phone tree to connect callers directly to a pre-recorded list of commonly requested services. Previously, all calls to 9-1-1 and the non-emergency line were answered by the City's 9-1-1 dispatchers. We have found that the phone tree has reduced non-emergency calls to dispatchers by 25 percent, while providing callers with a more streamlined experience. During the pandemic, due to the difficult nature of the job, it has been challenging to attract qualified candidates. As a way to increase staffing, we plan to hire Call-Taker Only positions in FY 23 to further reduce call volume, and launch an educational campaign, "Help Us Help You", focused on when the public should call 9-1-1.

In addition to the number of calls answered in a timely manner, the department also closely monitors:

- **Priority 1 Calls** – Police Communications processed 81 percent of Priority 1 calls within 60 seconds.
- **Quality Assurance Program** – This is a monthly review of 10 percent of all calls answered by dispatchers. Police dispatchers have conducted 100 percent of the reviews. We are currently working with the Fire Department to update the process of reviewing emergency medical calls.
- **Continuing Education Program** – Each year, Police dispatchers are required to complete 12 hours of Police Officer Standards Training (POST), designed for dispatchers, and Fire dispatchers are required to complete 12 hours of Emergency Medical Services training, designed for dispatchers. Year-to-date, the department has completed 89 percent of the trainings.
- **Talk Time** – This is the amount of time each dispatcher spends on a call. Year-to-date, Police dispatchers average 1:43 minutes on each call. This time is impacted by the number of calls requesting information on COVID-19, and now Monkeypox. Year-to-date, Fire dispatchers average 2:13 minutes on each call. This time is impacted by providing pre-arrival medical instructions and COVID-19 screening questions.

## Challenges

Due to the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak or other impacts requiring evacuation of the 9-1-1 Center, the department established a backup 9-1-1 Center located at the Energy Resources Department site. The backup center is fully operational with 14 consoles that closely mirror the consoles in the main Center. The department continues to run tests on the backup center's functionality and train 9-1-1 dispatchers on-site to maintain familiarity with the alternate location.

Following the same process as police officers, 9-1-1 dispatchers are required to pass a background investigation prior to hiring. This intensive process includes interviews with the applicant's relatives and associates, a polygraph test, and a psychological evaluation conducted by licensed professionals. The probationary period for a dispatcher is one year, also the same as a police officer and firefighter. During probation, dispatchers learn telephone procedures, interpersonal communications skills, basic radio functions, pre-arrival medical instructions and a variety of incident specific protocols such as domestic violence, and child and elder abuse. Some dispatchers are cross-trained in both Police and Fire call-taking protocols.

## Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment for 9-1-1 dispatchers is open and continuous throughout the year. Our 9-1-1 administration team works with the Civil Service Department to attend many career and public recruitment events – both in person and virtually. The 9-1-1 recruitment staff recently participated in the Job Fair at the Convention Center with over 4,000 job seekers in attendance. Our participation resulted in a list of 150 job seekers requesting additional information on becoming a 9-1-1 dispatcher.

The department recruits and trains an average of 20 dispatchers per year; however, the attrition rate is high. Since 2019, the 9-1-1 Center has hired 50 dispatchers. During the same time, we have lost 54 dispatchers to a combination of probationary resignation, dismissal, employee resignation, and retirement.

To address dispatcher attrition, the department continues its recruitment efforts through several strategies, including:

- Open and continuous recruitment
- Restructuring vacant Communications Center Coordinator to focus of recruitment
- Hiring part-time Public Safety Dispatchers
- Recruiting from other agencies
- Hiring Call-Taker Only Public Safety Dispatchers (Fiscal Year 2023)
- Rehiring retired Public Safety Dispatchers (annuitant)
- Offering “sit -a-longs” to potential recruits
- Refreshed website to focus on 9-1-1 Center and “JoinLB911” campaign

### **Hiring and Retention Incentive Program**

Over the years, the City Council has approved many incentive and retention measures such as wage and salary adjustments to make dispatcher’s salaries competitive in the region, including:

- [On April 14, 2020](#), the City Council approved amending the Fiscal Year 2020 Salary Resolution to revise the salary range for several classifications including dispatchers which resulted in an across-the-board 4 percent salary increase. In addition to the salary range increase, this action established four new dispatching skill pays for Public Safety Dispatcher I-IV, Communications Center Supervisor, and Communications Center Coordinator classifications.
- Staff responsible for training receive an additional \$2.84 per hour when training
- Cross-trained dispatchers receive an additional \$2.00 per hour
- The 9-1-1 Center was recently approved to participate in the newly approved Recruitment Incentive Program. Under this program newly hired dispatchers will receive a bonus of \$5,000 paid over the course of 18 months.

Dispatchers will receive a 2 percent cost of living adjustment on September 30, 2022, and another 1 percent increase on April 1, 2023, as part of the IAM contract.

Looking forward, the department has hired a consultant firm, Matrix Inc., to conduct a 9-1-1 Staffing Study, which will identify industry benchmarks and best practices, including staffing levels, recruitment and hiring practices, and overtime requirements. We anticipate this study to be concluded by the end of this fiscal year.

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Please let me know if you have questions or require additional information. I may be reached at [Reginald.Harrison@longbeach.gov](mailto:Reginald.Harrison@longbeach.gov) or 562-570-9460.

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