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February 10, 2016

Board of Directors Members  
Orange County Fire Authority  
1 Fire Authority Road  
Irvine, CA 92602

Ref: Defective OCFA EMS Model

Dear Board of Director Members:

I have long objected to the OCFA Emergency Medical Services (EMS) model. I have criticized it as high cost model that over-compensates union paramedics and firefighters to the financial detriment of the taxpaying public. Ironically, the OCFA's main responsibility is to the public and not to wage, pension and other benefit demands of the paramedics and firefighters. However, what cannot be ignored is the fact that the average firefighter's total yearly compensation is over \$230,000 for a qualified individual with a minimum high school education.

Furthermore, the interests of the public should reign supreme over the financial and political interests of the majority of current Board members. Unfortunately, it does not, regardless of what this group claims.

I have also criticized the EMS model as being a poor service model to those members of the public requiring EMS services from the OCFA. (See my attached December 24, 2015 letter on this subject.) Assuredly, the OCFA will cite their customer survey responses to dispute this statement. However, I have already completed an investigation of the OCFA customer survey complaints, and I am in a position to address such a predicted response. At this point I do not care to debate that matter.

Instead, I will address the recent Triton Group consultant study on EMS models that was submitted to the Costa Mesa City Council and Costa Mesa Fire Department. This study was discussed at the Costa Mesa City Council meeting on January 19, 2016, which I attended. Listed below are various observations that are associated with the Triton Group study.

1. The current Costa Mesa EMS model is basically the same model as the OCFA model.
2. OCFA Finance/Audit Manager, Jim Ruane, in numerous meetings I have attended has stated that the OCFA model is the best EMS model and other agencies use it because it is the best. However, the Triton Group does not agree with this repeated assertion. (I am not referring to the new enhanced EMS study model that was initiated by Chief Bowman.)
3. The OCFA model employs three pieces of equipment and a minimum of nine responding individuals. (Two pieces of OCFA fire fighting/EMS vehicles with seven of the referenced \$230,000 employees and one private ambulance company piece of equipment staffed by two EMT individuals paid dramatically lower wages and fringe benefits.)
4. The OCFA will be quick to point out that private ambulance company paramedics are not as well trained as the OCFA paramedics. This widespread assumption is incorrect and is completely unsupported with information from the Orange County Healthcare Agency (HCA). Private and OCFA paramedics are equally trained. However, private ambulance company paramedics actually have stiffer continuing accreditation requirements than OCFA paramedics. This added requirement is only applicable to private paramedics and not the OCFA paramedics.
5. The time has finally come for the HCA to provide a study comparing the performance of private paramedics involved in the County IFT Program with the performance of paramedics from the

OCFA and other Orange County Fire Departments. The study should also address completion of PCR's, which the County has already audited, found greatly deficient, and a concern to public safety.

6. The County HCA and not the OCFA should do a study comparison of OCFA paramedic wages, pensions and benefits to equally trained and qualified Orange County private paramedics. Private ambulance company paramedics make on average between \$65,000 to \$75,000 in total yearly compensation, as opposed to \$230,000 for equally trained OCFA paramedics.
7. The Costa Mesa Triton Group study rejects usage of the OCFA model, since it considers it costly, inefficient and lacking in proper service to the community. I quote from page 2 of the study.

The current practice is the response of an engine company, a fire based ambulance and a private ambulance provider to all EMS incidents. This type of response to medical emergencies is atypical when compared to best practices throughout the United States. Simply stated, this deployment model is not the most efficient for an urban city, operationally or financially.

8. I have learned that the private paramedic model is being used successfully at dramatically lower cost in neighboring counties. In fact, the private paramedic model was highly praised for its response and handling of the recent San Bernardino terrorist attack.
9. I believe the OCFA, as well as Costa Mesa and Irvine, should thoroughly vet the implementation and transition to a private paramedic model in Orange County. The fire fighters union is sure to wage an attack against any OCFA Board of Director or City Council member that endorses such a study. However, the OCFA Fire Chief, Costa Mesa Fire Chief, and Irvine City Manager can endorse conducting such a study. They do not have to worry about losing campaign funding or an endorsement in any upcoming election. This action will further solidify their reputations as being true Fire Department reform minded individuals.
10. All of the proposed Triton Group study models were rejected by the Costa Mesa City Council. However, the Costa Mesa Triton Group study, as well as the Irvine ESCI Fire Department study, did not include a private paramedic EMS model. In my opinion, they both should have.
11. The Costa Mesa City Council discussed the need for a new EMS model study that incorporated the use of private paramedics.
12. In the Costa Mesa City Council meeting, I also learned that the union four member engine staffing requirement has been renegotiated and reduced to a three member staffing requirement in the Costa Mesa Fire Department contract. It is of interest to note that the union insisted four member staffing requirement is only applicable for fire suppression and not for EMS responses.

Does the OCFA labor negotiator even know about this Costa Mesa contract modification development? Is he fighting to implement a similar minimum staffing requirement reform in our contract? If not, why not? This item continues to be ignored in OCFA Board meetings, along with all/most of my other written recommendations, some of which the Costa Mesa Fire Department is now considering.

13. The Costa Mesa Fire Department is currently studying whether to require all new recruits to be certified paramedics. It makes sense and is a recommendation for the OCFA also to implement as detailed in my attached December 24, 2015 letter. Why isn't the OCFA considering this hiring requirement for workers, who are to be paid \$230,000 in total yearly compensation?
14. The Costa Mesa Fire Department is also studying a peak staffing system change. It simply is to get rid of the 24 hour shift, wherein firefighters/paramedics are paid to sleep, eat, work out and enjoy large overtime payments, when the full complement of firefighters/paramedics is not even

needed in non-peak hourly periods. It is interesting to note that private ambulance paramedic companies routinely employ this peak staffing/non-24 hour model for their paramedics without any impact to public safety. Why isn't the OCFA considering a change to a peak staffing/non-24 hour shift?

15. Costa Mesa is considering an expanded Reserve Fire Fighter Program, which would dramatically lower costs without any impact to public safety. It could certainly be employed in early hour/off peak call periods. Costa Mesa acknowledged that there are significant benefits to a Reserve Fire Fighter Program. However, just the opposite has taken place at the OCFA. Also, has Irvine given serious consideration to this recommendation?

The OCFA firefighters union has successfully negotiated a dramatic reduction in this cost effective program. The result is more overtime for the firefighters and paramedics, when the staffing could be done by Reserve Program trained fire suppression personnel. Why isn't the OCFA labor negotiator working to negotiate an expansion of the Reserve Fire Fighter Program that would benefit the public?

Brad Reese, former OCFA Board of Director from Villa Park would be a perfect individual to consult on this issue. He formerly was a Reserve Fire Fighter Captain in the Program. Since major union backlash can be expected against any OCFA Board member that would endorse the expansion of the OCFA Reserve Program, it is incumbent that the OCFA Fire Chief proposes ways to promote the hiring of additional Reserve Program members.

16. Implementing an effective private paramedic model would finally eliminate those criticized ALS/BLS rebates, which the OCFA lobbyists have been successful with the Orange County Board of Supervisors in pulling from simple public discussion for two successive years now.

It will be interesting for the public to know some day, which County Supervisors have stopped even a public discussion of the merits of the OCFA ALS/BLS rebates to the complete detriment of seniors and the taxpaying public. It will give these groups additional information regarding casting votes in a future election. The old rule will finally come into play, "Forget what they say they are doing for your benefit; pay attention to what they actually do or do not do for your benefit."

To me the above issues are simply aligned with a union money and staffing issue. It provides a powerful incentive to the union to block all OCFA reform measures that address excessive wage, benefits, overtime and pensions. The opposition to these reform measures has very little to do with providing effective cost services to the public.

The public has virtually no real representation on the current OCFA Board of Directors, since only a small minority of the Board of Directors work to place the public's interests first. Many of the Board members are totally concerned with their own future political and financial gain, and not the interests of the public. As such, they do not endorse any study or reform measures that would incur the feared potential wrath of the union, and thereby jeopardize union campaign endorsements and funding contributions to them.

In closing, where is our labor negotiator on these issues? He has already received failing grades of F and F- on the last two union contracts he negotiated. However, in my taxpayer eyes, they both were negotiated for the benefit of a privileged few, at the complete expense of the non-represented taxpaying public.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Wontrobski

E:ocfacmstudy02-10-16

Cc: Orange County Board of Supervisors; Costa Mesa City Council Members; Irvine City Council Members; Tammi McConnell (EMCC Members); State EMSA Director; Orange County Grand Jury

Stephen Wontrobski  
27132 Sombras  
Mission Viejo, CA 92692

December 24, 2015

OCFA Board of Directors  
1 Fire Authority Road  
Irvine, CA 92602

Ref: EMS Paramedic Response Time Reforms

Dear Board of Director Members:

OCFA 911 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response times, substantially below accepted norms, jeopardize the lives and health of the public. They have long existed at an unacceptable rate at the OCFA. This is despite the fact that approximately 90% of the OCFA responses are for EMS, and only 10% for fire callouts.

I have sought OCFA improvement in its EMS response times. However, those requests fell on deaf ears of the following groups:

- a) OCFA Executive Staff
- b) OCFA Board of Directors (absent the sole director from Rancho Santa Margarita, Carol Gamble)
- c) OCFA Firefighters Union

It is so ironic, but so monetarily and politically guided, that all of these groups continually voice their never ending concern for the public safety. Yet, the real proof of their concern lies in action and not words. All of these groups were aware of the unacceptable EMS response times given in OCFA reports to the OCFA Board of Directors. But none of them took any steps or even offered recommendations to correct the problem. Public lives were at stake and nobody even attempted to institute any corrective action.

Then, the litany of past OCFA problems reached a boiling point, and the exiting fire chief was replaced with Chief Jeff Bowman. It did not take him very long to immediately grasp this obvious problem and put into effect a pilot program to improve EMS response times. On behalf of the public, I once again thank him for this action.

I believe the pilot program is only the start of needed reforms that will increase the EMS response times. These reforms will finally put the interest of public safety at the top of the list and replace the primary political and monetary interests of many of those members of the OCFA executive staff, Board of Directors, and union.

#### Reform Proposals

From a review of response time data and 911 customer complaint records to the OCFA, I offer the following EMS paramedic reform proposals, if not already implemented, for your consideration.

1. Approximately 3,000 applicants apply for each fire academy new enrollment of about 30 available slots. This equates to roughly 100 applicants for each available OCFA opening. Institute a requirement that applicants for admission to the fire academy class enrollment be limited to those applicants, who have existing paramedic state certification.
2. Require that all individuals seeking promotions to fire captain status have paramedic state licensing certification and county accreditation in effect.

3. Require that all paramedics, who have switched over to administrative positions, be required to take a refresher course for paramedics to acquaint themselves with new paramedic advances before allowing them to come back in an active paramedic/non-administrative job responsibility.
4. Require all fire captains, who are not also licensed paramedics, to obtain a paramedic license within one year.
5. Hire more paramedic applicants with Vietnamese and Spanish speaking abilities. This will address public complaints regarding communication problems with Spanish and Vietnamese 911 patients and their caregivers.
6. Hire more female paramedics to address the complaint of lack of respect for female modesty. This will address the complaint of allowing other mostly male firefighters to be unneeded female examination onlookers.
7. Limit the number of firefighters in a room where two paramedics are examining a patient. Why are there instances of seven firefighters in a room gazing at a female patient, when only two paramedics are conducting the medical assessment?
8. Have individual fire captains instruct non-needed non-paramedic personnel to leave the room while an examination is being done by the paramedics. Why this issue has simply been ignored, despite complaints from the public of overcrowding in the room and lack of respect for female modesty, needs to be immediately addressed.

### Conclusion

If these simple recommendations are implemented, the following beneficial public safety results will immediately take hold.

1. Only one unit and not two units will need to respond to a 911 EMS call.
2. A maximum of four firefighters would arrive on the scene. With the expansion of the Chief's EMS enhancement response model, only two firefighters would need to arrive for many calls.
3. Respect for female modesty demands would be addressed.
4. There would be a maximum of three OCFA personnel in a room, two paramedics and a fire captain. With the completion of all fire captains paramedic licensing, this could be reduced to two personnel in a room.
5. Vietnamese and Spanish communication problems would be sharply diminished.
6. Women OCFA applicants would be able to secure more much needed female paramedic opportunities.
7. Additional units would be freed up to respond to future fire and EMS calls.

I thank you for your consideration and action on these reform proposals.

Stephen M. Wontrobski

E: ocfaparmedreform12-19-15

Cc: Orange County Board of Supervisors; Tammi McConnell (County EMS Program Manager)