

CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE



Date: April 24, 2020

To: The Honorable Paul Krekorian, Chair  
City Council Budget and Finance Committee  
Attention: Andrew Choi, Legislative Assistant  
Office of the City Clerk

From: Aram Sahakian, General Manager  
Emergency Management Department

Subject: **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT COMMENTS ON THE  
MAYOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020-21**

The on-going support of the City Council Budget and Finance Committee has made a significant difference in the Emergency Management Department's (EMD) ability to hire talented staff and maintain our emergency management programs. The current budget environment which is highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic heightens the need for EMD to be fiscally responsible, while ensuring we are able to fulfill our key operational responsibilities which includes being ready to respond when any emergency impacts our city government and residents.

As one of the key public safety City agencies, EMD plays a critical role in emergency response and recovery. As an example on March 26, I revised the department-wide work schedule from 9/80 to 5/40 to ensure appropriate staffing for the increasing demands of the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Mayor's Proposed FY 20/21 budget for EMD included reduced services in the amount of \$339,382. This equates to reduced funding to reflect 26 fewer working days consistent with the furlough program for other civilian City employees. EMD requests exemption from the furlough program for its employees due to essential department functions and the requirement of our staff to coordinate citywide response in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and to serve in a liaison role at Unified Command Posts for planned and emergency events. EMD continues to be understaffed for the day-to-day tasks associated with citywide emergency planning, response and recovery.

During activations of the EOC maximum staffing levels must be maintained in order to fulfill our responsibilities. The 2019 wildfires and current COVID-19 EOC activations have demonstrated that EMD has an extremely limited staffing capacity to fulfill all its responsibilities in a non-furlough climate. If furloughed, EMD will not have the staffing levels necessary to meet the demands of coordinating citywide response and recovery, which includes staffing our required positions in the EOC and the Business Operations Center (BOC). Critical response functions such as situational awareness, resource management, citywide coordination and mass notification will be impacted leading to gaps which could result in loss of life and property. The on-going planning and training efforts that EMD manages on a day-to-day basis will become limited, which will lead to an inadequately trained emergency responder workforce.

Our request for exemption from the furlough program is also based on the uncertain length of the current COVID-19 response. Based on the current activity levels in the EOC, there is an anticipated longer than normal recovery period, which would require EMD staffing to coordinate City government, non-profit and private sector recovery initiatives, and to provide oversight and staffing of multiple Local Assistance Centers citywide. Additionally, there are projections that there could be a second COVID-19 event this fall. As a result, we are extremely concerned about the potential for a secondary, simultaneous event such as a fire or earthquake, concurrent with the ongoing COVID-19 event. This would stretch EMD's staff resources to the breaking point posing a significant risk to public safety and the effective operation and leadership of the EOC. EMD is currently developing plans for this scenario as part of its advanced planning efforts and in response to recent motions by Councilmembers Rodriguez and Koretz.

EMD is one of the City's primary public safety agencies and is responsible for citywide preparedness, response, and recovery coordination. With 29 full-time staff and 7 part-time interns, we carry a level of responsibility that is unique. EMD's role is critical to all 40 plus City agencies, 15 Council District offices, 4 million residents and over 500,000 businesses. EMD supports its primary function through direct alignment with the Mayor's public safety priorities. Our budget allocation should reflect the importance of EMD's critical response and recovery roles in the City as a public safety agency on par with Police and Fire. EMD remains focused on core tasks, critical emergency response functions, and the optimization of grant funding. There is no greater responsibility for the City of Los Angeles than to protect its residents and ensure that the City is ready to respond to and recover from natural or man-made emergencies and disasters.

We appreciate your continued support of EMD's mission to promote a culture of readiness in the City of Los Angeles. If you have questions about this memo, please contact me directly at 213-216-6210.

C: Ed Roes  
Elaine Duong