



COUNTY OF VENTURA

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June 18, 2024

Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura
800 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura CA 93009

SUBJECT: Recommendation of Supervisor LaVere and Supervisor Lopez that the Board direct the County Executive Officer to take over and manage the County of Ventura Ambulance Request for Proposal process for an Exclusive Ground Ambulance Transport and Related Medical Services Provider.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Direct the County Executive Officer to take over and manage the County of Ventura Request for Proposal process for an exclusive ground ambulance transport and related medical services provider and return to our Board later this year with new recommendations for our Board to consider.

BACKGROUND:

Our Board was previously scheduled to receive a presentation of the County of Ventura Ambulance Request for Proposal for an exclusive ground ambulance transport and related medical services provider for review, comment and direction at our Board meeting on May 21, 2024. As part of that May 21st agenda item, we were also asked to approve the proposed Evaluation Committee composition for Request for Proposal rating and scoring. However, this item was pulled from our May 21st agenda by the County Executive Officer. This item was not considered or acted upon by our Board on May 21st. Nor was the Request for Proposals issued. For the reasons discussed below, it is now our recommendation that the County Executive Officer take over and manage this Request for Proposal process and return to our Board later this year with new recommendations for our Board to consider.

DISCUSSION:

The Ventura County Emergency Medical Services Agency (Ventura County EMS) oversees the provision of ambulance services for the entire County. While Ventura County EMS has maintained successful partnerships with our local private ambulance providers for over four decades, the

ambulance industry has changed rapidly in recent years. On July 26, 2022, our Board was presented a comprehensive review of the ambulance system and our Board unanimously supported the recommendation to discontinue the perpetual renewal of the existing contracted providers and directed EMS staff to develop a competitive procurement process for all future contract awards for emergency ground ambulance transport services. At this time, one of the concerns shared by several Board members was the need for just one countywide exclusive operating area "EOA" (as compared to the seven exclusive operating areas in our current plan) and we wanted a system that provided enhanced, equitable services to all county residents, particularly to those residents in disadvantaged communities such as South Oxnard.

The board letter and presentation our Board was set to receive on May 21, 2024, put forth a Request for Proposal (RFP) for our Board's review that we find deficient, and we believe the process that led to the creation of the proposed RFP was flawed in many ways. To start, the RFP we were set to review did create a single EOA, however it also created ten "subzones" within the EOA which would only amplify the service problems we have seen with the current seven operating areas in our current system. We continue to believe that we need a single EOA to ensure equitable service and this is not what we were set to receive given the ten subzones.

We also believe the plan we were set to review at our meeting on May 21, 2024, would have resulted in degraded services to many communities within our County. While the current standards for response times in urban areas (90% between 8-10 minutes), suburban areas (90% within 20 minutes) and rural areas (90% within 30 minutes) all stayed the same in the proposed new system, the time in which fines could be levied for not timely responding to a call were significantly increased in each area. For example, under the current system an ambulance provider can be fined if it does not respond to a call for service in a suburban area within 20 minutes, yet under the proposed system fines could not commence until a provider was 40 minutes or more late to a call. Similar extensions of time before fines could be levied also applied to urban and rural areas. Furthermore, vague language involving mutual aid requirements would have likely resulted in diminished services to Bell Canyon, Lockwood Valley and Hungry Valley.

Moreover, taking a deeper dive into response times, the requirements for what is considered "on scene" under the proposed system would be detrimental to many local residents. Under the proposed system, "on scene" was defined as arriving at the dispatched location *or at the entrance of a gated community, mobile home park or apartment complex*. If an ambulance arrives at the entrance to Leisure Village, Lake Sherwood or Wood Ranch (as examples), there is a likely chance they still have 1-2 miles before they arrive at the dispatched location. Thus, the provider would be credited for being "on scene" when in reality they were not actually at the scene of the emergency. Such a system is inherently unfair to the many residents living in mobile home parks, apartment complexes and gated communities.

The proposed weighted scoring system for the proposed RFP also seriously discounted response times (5%) and number of ambulances on the road (5%), yet gave high value to experience and local management team (17.5%). We believe this scoring system is skewed because faster response times and more ambulances on the road providing life-saving care is specifically what

the Board was looking for in a new EMS system when this issue was initially discussed in July 2022.

We also have significant concerns about the make-up of the ambulance contract steering committee which was responsible for developing the competitive procurement process. Per the board letter from May 21, 2024, this steering committee consisted of representatives from the County Executive Office, Sheriff's OES, Medical Director EMS, Hospital Association of Southern California, Medical Examiner's Office, Behavioral Health Department, and the Public Health Department. The ambulance contract steering committee did not include any representatives from local fire departments, local cities, local hospitals or social service providers, all of whom play critical roles in our current system. These important voices would have provided essential feedback regarding gaps in our current system and ways we could improve the system. Such relevant input should have been considered as part of the development of the competitive procurement process.

For all of these reasons, we believe a re-set is needed for this RFP and competitive procurement process. It is our recommendation that the County Executive Officer take over and manage this RFP process moving forward. Dr. Johnson and her team have the experience and capacity necessary to make improvements to the proposed system and bring us back a revised, more equitable RFP and procurement process by the end of the year. To protect the fairness of the process, organizations that the County knows intend to compete for the RFP, including but not limited to the County's current contracted providers and Ventura County Fire Protection District, should not be invited to provide input on the development of the RFP and competitive procurement process after a publicly noticed forum. Nor should they serve on the ambulance contract steering committee.

When it comes to emergency response, our residents deserve the best possible system and that is what we hope to achieve.

This letter and recommended actions have been reviewed by the County Executive Office and County Counsel. I recommend that our Board adopt the recommended actions.

Cordially,



Matt LaVere
Supervisor, First District



Vianey Lopez
Supervisor, Fifth District