



Serving Charles County

CHARLES COUNTY
VOLUNTEER FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION, INC.
AND
CHARLES COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES, INC.

P.O. Box 21, LA PLATA, MARYLAND 20646



Board of County Commissioners
200 Baltimore Street
La Plata, Maryland 20646

May 6, 2020

Commissioners,

As the President of the CCVFA, a forty (40) plus year member of the Indian Head Volunteer Fire Department & Rescue Squad (President for the last 15 years) and a life-long citizen and tax payer of Charles County, I would like to express my concerns regarding the proposed 2021 budget for the Department of Emergency Services (DES).

I believe the DES request for a funding increase for the upcoming year of \$2 million plus dollars is exceedingly out of bounds based upon their accompanying justification documents. The outline of their request reflects a total increase of approximately \$1.3M but expands even further if you factor in the addition of new ALS and BLS units in the county.

If the addition of these services are approved as requested (Company 7 and Company 10) bear in mind the total for these requests of \$349K at Co. 7 and \$416K at Co. 10 are for personnel only and do not provide funding/money for apparatus, housing, Mobile Display Terminal (MDT) vehicle insurance or maintenance and fuel. These costs will be paid for out of the budgets of Co. 7 and Co. 10 which is also the case throughout the county at all stations staffed by DES employees with the exception of DES units brought in from time to time on an as-needed basis. In short, these costs are and have always been paid out of volunteer budgets and at no cost to DES while at the same time DES bills for services while operating volunteer ambulances housed in volunteer stations. All of this is happening on a daily basis, with the Volunteer Fire and EMS companies not receiving any percentage increase in funding from the county in more than 25 years.

Based on the above, the DES request for a \$2M plus increase is even more out of order since DES realizes an increase in their budget every year. This is not to say DES year-to-year costs do not increase – it does; however, that yearly increase in costs is also felt by the Volunteer companies in the county. The Volunteer departments in the county (total of 17) receive funding from County Government as a percentage of the collected property tax which varies from year to year. The total percentage amount is then divided into three (3) categories – Fire, EMS, and LOSAP (the total going to each of these categories is in accordance with Chapter 54 law). The LOSAP funds sees the smallest amount of funding each year by law and has fallen short of needed funding by approximately \$130K in the last few years.

To appropriately maintain the LOSAP funding, monies have been taken from our LOSAP portfolio to satisfy yearly obligations.

The County Fire and EMS Association companies recently held several “special” Executive Committee meetings to review its on-going financial situation. After several months of meetings, the Committee compiled a presentation of changes to the Chapter 54 law to allow us to receive an increase in funding once approved by the Board of Fire and Rescue Commissioners. It was presented to the Board of Fire and Rescue Commissioners at its February meeting with no support from the Charles County Commissioners and was rejected. Among the reason for their rejection of our plan was we had not provided enough historical data on cost increases, increases in call volume, shortfalls in funding, projected needs and associated costs, etc. We were also told one of the reasons for a shortage in funding to the individual companies was because we take too much money off the “top” of our budgeted amount of funding. One of the largest amounts of funding that comes off the “top” of our budget is for our “MDT’s” which are computer-like units carried in all apparatus. These units provide vital information to responding units and also process reports, provide GPS and unit status. A contract was recently executed to purchase and maintain over 130 MDT units at a cost of over \$900K. Most of the funding had been escrowed over the years by the Fire and EMS Associations; however, \$228K had to be borrowed from a local bank to fulfill the Fire Association purchase obligation. This monthly loan payment and other associated costs are paid out of our MDT escrow account. At the beginning and the end of the MDT replacement process (approximately 2 years) the Fire and EMS leadership approached County Commissioners requesting financial assistance with this endeavor and were denied on each request.

All of this in addition to the fact that after taking money off the “top” of our budgets the Fire and EMS Departments are regularly left with only 70% to 85% of the original total amount distributed to individual companies. In fact, at the last EMS Association meeting held in August 2019 the group voted to infuse \$100K from “future station” funds to raise the funding amount for distribution to the same level as was distributed in 2018. That move made the total amount for distribution to the EMS Companies in Charles County in 2019 equal to 75% of our desired (budget formula) amount. How much longer can we survive if there is no increase in the percentage from the property tax allocated to fund our Volunteer Fire and EMS Departments?

In the end I am only asking the present request for additional funding by DES be carefully reviewed and analyzed and held to the same standard of justification to which the Volunteers are held. Additionally, that DES requests are also in line with the recently completed comprehensive study by Mission Critical Partners which cost the County taxpayers over \$180K (of which approximately \$90K was paid by the Fire and EMS Association). This study involved County Fire and EMS, DES, and Communications and recommendations were made on each regarding many aspects of their current and future state.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of my concerns during this budget process. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.



Richard Bowie, President, CCVFA