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Long Beach Police and Fire Dispatch Audit Shows Need For Improved Recruitment Process
Dispatcher Positions Prove to be Difficult to Fill and Retain Resulting in Significant Overtime Costs

Long Beach, CA – Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud today released an audit of the City's Police and Fire Departments' Emergency Communications Centers. The audit was initiated as the result of a Fraud Hotline anonymous complaint regarding inappropriate payment of "night shift differential pay" to some dispatchers. While the complaint was substantiated, further review found an extensive amount of overtime being paid to dispatchers. In 2014 overtime hours comprised 22% of all dispatcher work hours at a cost of more than \$1.3 million. This led to an audit evaluating how staffing practices may have contributed to increased overtime hours and pay.

The Long Beach Police and Fire Departments both operate individual Emergency Communications Centers staffed by dispatchers. The audit found that the two Emergency Communications Centers answered emergency calls well within industry standards. In 2013 the Police dispatchers answered nearly 95% of all emergency calls within 10 seconds surpassing the established performance standard. Fire dispatchers answered 97% of all emergency calls within 15 seconds also surpassing the industry performance standard. However, the number of dispatcher position vacancies was so high that the Emergency Communications Centers relied heavily on current personnel to work significant amounts of overtime.

The Emergency Communications Centers have been understaffed for several years as the City's recruitment efforts have not been able to meet the Departments' needs. The recruitment process, which has been lengthy and infrequent, resulted in a limited number of qualified candidates. Compounding this problem the audit found that, of those hired, only 40% (on average) were able to finish the mandatory one-year probationary period.

The Departments' management agreed with the recommendations in the audit report. During and subsequent to the audit, the Departments have taken steps to shorten the recruitment process by using a new testing agency and having outside firms assist with candidate background investigations. The audit found that it is imperative the Departments' hiring efforts be more strategically directed with a sustained emphasis on recruitment. Otherwise, as noted in the audit, it would take up to 12 years to reach budgeted staffing levels for the necessary dispatcher positions.

"I am very pleased to report that the Emergency Communications Centers and our dispatchers are doing a great job at meeting industry standards considering they handle close to 1 million calls annually," said City Auditor Laura Doud. "I am concerned, however, that our Emergency Communications Centers were so understaffed that significant amounts of overtime hours and pay were required. Lack of sufficient rest and the high levels of stress associated with these positions can result in an unhealthy work environment and a decline in peak performance due to fatigue. The dispatchers are doing a great job, although there is very little margin for error."

The complete Police and Fire Public Safety Dispatcher Overtime Audit can be viewed at the City Auditor's website: www.CityAuditorLauraDoud.com.

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