September 27, 2019

AN OPEN LETTER TO GOV. NEWSOM AND THE CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE: ACTION NEEDED NOW TO ENSURE CRITICAL FUNDING FOR EMERGENCY AIR AMBULANCES

Air ambulances save lives, flying thousands of missions to connect the sick or injured with emergency, trauma or specialty care. But without urgent action by the State of California, these life-saving services and the Californians they serve are at risk.

Approximately 70 emergency air ambulance helicopters and airplanes serve the state, covering nearly 164,000 square miles to serve more than 39 million Californians in their time of need. The state’s most rural and vulnerable communities in particular depend on this emergency medical resource to quickly transfer patients to urban medical centers. This medical transport ensures access to urgent, life-sustaining care at neonatal centers and children’s hospitals, burn units, trauma centers, and cardiac and stroke centers.

Air ambulances also play a vital role in disaster and emergency response, from car accidents to wildfires. During the 2018 Carr Fire in Redding, air ambulances quickly evacuated at-risk hospitals, including an entire neonatal unit where newborns and their mothers were receiving critical care. Injured firefighters and residents were also flown by air ambulance to burn centers to get urgent, life-saving care.

Current funding for these critical services comes from a fee on moving vehicle violations and is used to supplement Medi-Cal payments, which haven’t been adjusted for more than 25 years and are inadequate to cover the cost of service. The moving violation fee expires Dec. 31, 2019.

If the State Legislature does not take immediate action to assure a new funding source, air medical bases across the state will be forced to close or cut back on the emergency services they provide, leaving a perilous hole in California’s emergency readiness for all.

We call upon the Governor and State Legislature to establish a replacement funding source and update Medi-Cal rates to help cover the cost of service. Assembly Bill 651 (Grayson) does so while strengthening important consumer safeguards to ensure critical services are accessible to all Californians when they need it.*

NOTE: AB 651 was amended 9/9/19 to extend the moving violation fee until 7/1/20 to give the Governor, Dept. of Finance and Legislature time to address long-term budgeting when the short-term funding extension expires.
At a time when emergency preparedness is a top priority for California, it is imperative the state act now to fund air ambulances and the life-saving services they provide.

Signed,

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California Metropolitan Fire  
Chiefs Association

Steve Kovacs, President  
Fire Districts Association  
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Barbara Glaser, Senior  
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Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection District
Central Calaveras Fire and Rescue
City of Angels Fire Department
Mad River Community Hospital
Mokelumne Hill Fire Protection District
Mono County Department of EMS
Murphys Fire Protection District
Northern Inyo Healthcare District
San Andreas Fire Protection District
Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians
West Point Fire Protection District