

*City of Alexandria, Virginia*

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 4, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #54: STAFFING RATIOS AND REQUEST FOR  
ADDITIONAL EMERGENCY RESCUE TECHNICIANS (ERTs)

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This memorandum is in response to Councilman Krupicka's request for information on the impact of changing the ratio of ERT staff to ERT supervisors from 13 to 1 to 14 or 15 to 1; the impact if this change in ratio is implemented in lieu of hiring additional ERTs (\$109,484); and how the City's staffing ratios compare with the neighboring jurisdictions. This request is in response to the discretionary supplemental request by the Fire Department for two additional ERT positions (\$109,484).

The EMS staffing ratio is currently 6-7 ERTs to 1 Supervisor, not the 13 to 1 ratio as shown in the footnote on page 9-4 of the FY 2007 Proposed budget document, which was incorrect. The current ratios are the result of the staffing requests approved over the past two budget processes, including the upgrade of four ERT positions to Supervisors approved in the context of the FY 2006 budget process. A reduction in the current ratio of ERT's to Supervisors would result in a decrease in the overall quality assurance in the field.

The FY 2007 supplemental budget request for two additional ERTs is not tied to the ratio issues indicated above, as these two additional positions would provide for half of the additional ERTs required to enable the Fire Department to have two Advanced Life Support (ALS) providers on each of the City's five medic units 100 percent of the time (a total of 4 are required). With the approval of two additional ERTs, the number of ALS providers on each medic unit would fall short of the four ERTs required to meet the goal of having two ALS providers on each medic unit 100 percent of the time, but would provide a significant improvement over the current level of medic unit staffing. In addition, the cost to hire two additional ERT's (\$109,484) would be more than offset by the \$700,000 in additional revenue that will be generated by the proposed increase in ambulance fees (see below).

In FY 2005, the Fire Department originally submitted a supplemental budget request for eight additional ERT positions and for the upgrade of four existing ERT positions to the position of ERT Supervisor. As part of the FY 2005 budget deliberation process, the Alexandria Fire Department's Operational Medical Director, Dr. James Vafier, outlined the need to bring the level of staffing on each of the City's five medic units from one ALS provider to two ALS providers at all times due to extraordinary levels of sophistication in life saving procedures for which Dr. Vafier trains and authorizes City ERT staff to perform. At that time, and still today, some units were staffed with one ALS provider and one basic life support provider (BLS Provider) making it difficult for those units to deliver the highest levels of care in all type of medical situations. A BLS provider cannot undertake all the functions that an ALS provider can undertake. It should be noted that the highest level of care is provided in most medical situations but not all situations. In general, Alexandria provides one of the highest levels of EMS response care in the entire Washington Metropolitan area.

During those same deliberations, Dr. Vafier discussed the need for additional field supervisors in order to decrease or improve the ratio of ERTs to supervisors from the prior 13-14 ERTs per supervisor to 6-7 ERTs per supervisor in order to improve overall quality assurance in the field. These needs were reaffirmed in an organizational assessment of EMS conducted by the City Manager's Office in early 2005.

In order to address both the need to provide two ALS providers on each medic unit as well as reduce and improve the ratio of personnel to supervisors, it was agreed during the FY 2005 budget process that the request for eight additional ERT's and the upgrade of four ERT's to supervisor positions would be split and provided for over the next three fiscal years (FY 2005-FY 2007). As a result, in FY 2005, four additional ERT's were approved and hired; and in FY 2006, four existing ERT positions were upgraded to supervisor. Those promotions took place in September 2005 and effectively lowered the ratio of supervision from 13-14 ERT's per supervisor to 6-7 ERTs per supervisor (6-7:1). However, this still left a gap in the number of paramedics required to meet the goal of two ALS providers on each of the City's five medic units 100 percent of the time, which Fire sought to address in this FY 2007 budget process.

The FY 2007 discretionary supplemental budget request was initially to complete the process described above by adding the final four of the eight additional ERT's. Due the fiscal constraints of this year's budget, that request was funded at only two of the four requested positions.

The approval of the two additional ERTs in lieu of the four requested will not affect the department in terms of ratio, however it will not have as positive an impact on service delivery and EMS's ability to meet the standard of care set forth by Dr. Vafier.

### **Staffing Ratio Comparison** <sup>1</sup>

The staffing ratios are currently 6-7 ERTs to 1 Supervisor not the 13 to 1 ratio as shown in the footnote on page 9-4 of the FY 2007 Proposed budget document. The current ratios are the result

of the staffing requests approved over the past two budget processes, including the upgrade of four ERT positions to Supervisors approved in the context of the FY 2006 budget process. As shown below, the ratio of ERTs to Supervisors is now comparable with the City’s neighboring jurisdictions, Fairfax and Arlington Counties. A reduction in the ratio of ERT’s to Supervisors would not only result in a ratio that is worse than the neighboring jurisdictions, but would also result in a decrease in the overall quality assurance in the field.

	City of Alexandria	Fairfax County	Arlington County
Medic Units	5	24	7
Supervisors Per Shift	2	6	2
Personnel	13	24 <sup>/2</sup>	14
Ratio of Supervisors to Personnel	1:6.5	1:4	1:7

**Notes:**

- /1 There is a significant difference in the level of care provided by medic units in Fairfax and Arlington Counties as compared to the City of Alexandria. Fairfax County medic unit personnel are not trained or authorized to provide Rapid Sequence Intubation or Adult Sternal Infusions. In Arlington County only the two Supervisors can provide Rapid Sequence Intubation. The higher level of care provided by all Alexandria medic units requires a higher level of supervision.
- /2 EMS Supervisors essentially supervise one lieutenant on each medic unit. Alexandria does not have an intermediate level.

**Revenue**

Currently, the City of Alexandria charges the lowest fees for ambulance service, when compared to the area’s local jurisdictions. In order to pay for its budget initiatives, including the two additional ERT positions, the Fire Department is proposing to increase the current ambulance transport fee rate of \$200 for Alexandria residents and \$250 for non-Alexandria residents to \$300 for Basic Life Support (BLS) transports; \$400 for Advanced Life Support-1 (ALS-1) transports; and \$550 for ALS-2 transports. It is projected that with this increase in fees, revenues should increase from \$400,000 budgeted in FY 2005 to approximately \$1.1 million in FY 2007, which represents an increase of approximately \$700,000. This additional revenue is more than adequate to cover the cost of two additional ERTs (\$109,484) as requested by the Fire Department as a discretionary supplemental.