

# LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



SEP 1 2009

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FIRE CHIEF

August 21, 2009

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
FILE NO. 09-103

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM: Douglas L. Barry, Fire Chief *DLB*

SUBJECT: **FIRE DEPARTMENT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS –  
“LEARNING FOR LIFE” SERVICE PROVIDER TRANSITION**

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

**Recommendation:** That the Board:

1. Request a formal opinion from the City Attorney's office regarding Learning for Life services provided to City departments.
2. Provide direction to the Department not to initiate re-charter efforts with Learning for Life for calendar year 2010.
3. Approve a ninety-day transition period for the Department to implement a revised youth development program in conjunction with the Mayor's Volunteer Program.

**Summary:**

On February 26, 2008, a letter was sent to the City Attorney and copied to the Fire Commission and others from Mr. Brian Chase, Senior Staff Attorney for the LAMBDA Legal Defense and Education Fund (LAMBDA Legal). This correspondence set forth LAMBDA Legal's concerns regarding the ongoing relationship between the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the youth service provider, Learning for Life (LFL).

LAMBDA Legal's position is that Boy Scouts of America (BSA) discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation and religion. Furthermore, they contend that LFL (the umbrella organization for the LAPD and LAFD exploring programs) is acting as an agent for the BSA, and is the same entity for legal purposes even though they are separately incorporated.

Mr. Chase urged the City Attorney "to issue an opinion directing the City to immediately disaffiliate with LFL so that the youth programs of the LAPD and LAFD can develop in a way that clearly rejects discrimination and that is fully consistent with Los Angeles Municipal Code sect 10.8.2."

On April 15, 2008, the Department provided a verbal report to the board relative to the status of the Department's youth development programs and our affiliation with LFL. Following the presentation, further discussion took place regarding the appropriateness of maintaining an ongoing relationship with LFL in consideration of the correspondence received from LAMBDA Legal.

The board requested the City Attorney provide a formal legal opinion regarding the issues raised by LAMBDA Legal. A final and definitive opinion from the City Attorney has yet to be provided.

On October 7, 2008, the board again discussed the LFL issue during its regularly scheduled meeting. The board determined that progress had been made by LFL to come into compliance with City policy regarding discriminatory business practices. LFL was granted an extension by the board until December 16, 2008 to allow time to continue their efforts to gain compliance.

Unfortunately, the December 16, 2008 board meeting was cancelled. This cancellation provided additional time for LFL to comply with City policy and necessitated the initiation of re-charter efforts to provide continued LFL health insurance to existing LAFD Explorers for calendar year 2009.

The Department has responded to board direction to prepare a revised youth development program in conjunction with the Mayor's Volunteer Program. The proposed LAFD Cadet Program would be self-administered by the Department, mirror (and replace) the existing LFL administered Explorer Program and continue to utilize Department volunteers for program support.

### **Discussion:**

With program support received from LFL the Department has provided two primary youth development programs: the LAFD Explorer and Fire Instruction Recruitment and Education (F.I.R.E.) Programs. These programs serve young men and women who are 14 (and have completed the eighth grade) through 20 years of age.

Both youth programs, run primarily by volunteer members within the Department, provide for early education/career guidance for youth in becoming members of the LAFD. The programs also offer other important benefits: they provide youth participants with positive adult role models, provide peer support, teach life skills, promote the personal rewards of public service, and offer the Department an important avenue for the recruitment of quality male and female candidates.

The Department's youth programs also provide positive alternatives for youth. Although not specifically intended to serve as anti-gang efforts, the programs surely assist in directing youth participants away from gang involvement and other negative influences.

The Explorer and F.I.R.E. youth development programs are provided funding through Human Relations Development Committee (HRDC) funds to provide youth uniform items. Both programs have been instrumental in providing a resource pool for qualified firefighter candidates for the City of Los Angeles. The programs are actively promoted within the Department and are limited solely by the number of interested members willing to volunteer and available Department resources.

Additionally, the Department continues to support supplemental youth programs administered by the Los Angeles Unified School District at James Monroe High School ("McComb Fire Academy") and at Banning High School by providing volunteer firefighter/mentors and logistical support.

An overview of the current LAFD Explorer Program and proposed LAFD Cadet Program follows:

#### **Existing LAFD Explorer Program**

The Department has offered an effective Explorer Program for many years. Today, seventeen LAFD Explorer Posts are located throughout the City of Los Angeles. Currently, 351 youth participants and 127 "adult leaders" are registered with LFL and participate in the Department's Explorer Program.

The Department Explorer Program has relied on LFL employees assigned to two separate LFL geographical areas (LA & West LA) for program support.

As a "participating organization" the Department is required to abide by LFL program requirements. LFL provides youth supplemental medical insurance coverage (nominal charge of \$1 per year paid by each participant), adult leadership training for post advisors, youth protection training, and administers associated program activities including explorer post outing permits.

##### **LA Area LFL - serves eleven LAFD posts**

(Fire Station 11, 12, 27, 33, 34, 38, 47, 64, 68, 88/Crew 3 and 94).

202 - Youth Explorers

98 - Adult Leaders

##### **West LA Area LFL - serves six posts**

(Fire Station 59, 87, 89, 100, 106 and Harbor FIRE).

149 - Youth Explorers

29 - Adult Leaders

To ensure best practices and results, the Department has utilized a Program Coordinator, Explorer Post Advisors, and Assistant Post Advisors to provide program consistency and to administer the explorer program. These dedicated members are primarily assigned to platoon-duty assignments and volunteer hundreds of hours annually to serve youth in this capacity.

Many of the advisors are "paying back" the program after participating as a LAFD Explorer themselves. Post Advisors hold regular meetings at each post and receive support from Battalion Chief Gregory Reynar, the Department's Explorer Program Coordinator.

Race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, economic status, and citizenship are not criteria for explorer program participation.

### **Proposed LAFD Cadet Program**

The proposed cadet program has been designed to closely mirror the successful explorer program. The cadet program was developed following a review of other regional youth programs including programs provided by the Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Fire Department and the Ventura County Fire Department.

During the development of the cadet program it was determined the Department could effectively self-administer a replacement program. Each facet of the existing explorer program (i.e. participation, adult leadership, supplemental health insurance, outing permits and liability waivers) could be effectively duplicated and safely provided.

Implementation of the proposed cadet program allows for a smooth transition away from LFL for current participants and would provide the Department the ability to return to a LFL administered explorer program if deemed appropriate in the future.

Consistent with the existing explorer program, the proposed cadet program will serve youth 14 to 20 years of age and provide a structured, safe exposure to the career of firefighting using current Department volunteers. Cadet program goals are as follows:

- Introduce young men and women ages 14 (and have completed the eighth grade) through 20 to the fire service as a possible career choice.
- Provide youth with positive adult and peer role models in a safe and supervised environment.
- Improve Department community relations efforts by providing a successful youth development program.
- Provide for the recruitment of quality male and female candidates into the fire service.

- Provide an opportunity for youth to develop positive relationships and further develop character and leadership qualities in a caring environment.
- Provide youth opportunities to serve their communities through volunteer service with the Department.

Race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, economic status, and citizenship are not criteria for cadet program participation.

In preparing for potential implementation of the cadet program a number of issues have been addressed and resolved. The Department has worked with members of the Mayor's office, the Mayor's Volunteer Program staff and CAO staff in development of components of the proposed cadet program. The following actions have been completed:

- All explorers have been registered as members of the Mayor's Volunteer Program.
- A comprehensive "Cadet Manual" has been drafted which outlines program requirements for youth participants and Department members.
- Explorer Post Advisors have been briefed on the proposed cadet program.
- Uniform cadet patches have been purchased to replace explorer patches ("Explorer" is a trademark term of LFL).
- Supplemental insurance coverage has been identified and secured via the CAO administered "Volunteer Worker Insurance Program."

In order to maintain current Department youth programs and effectively address remaining issues created by a disassociation with LFL an appropriate transition period of ninety days will be required. This temporary transition period would allow the Department adequate time to address the following remaining obstacles:

- Pursue a formal partnership opportunity with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).
- Officially notify LFL of the Department's intent to not re-charter for calendar year 2010.
- Obtain final program approval and publish the draft Cadet Manual.
- Allow for transition meetings to be held with current explorer advisors.
- Provide explorers time to replace explorer patches with provided cadet patches.

- Provide advisors time to remove "Explorer" from issued personal protective equipment.
- Identify alternative activities for youth participants (LFL sponsored training exercises and explorer musters will no longer be available for Department participation).

### **Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Partnership**

On June 15, 2009, I met with LAUSD Superintendent Ramon Cortines. This meeting was initiated to explore a potential LAUSD/LAFD partnership for a revised youth program. Dr. Shelley Weston, LAUSD Assistant Superintendent was assigned to work with the Department to develop a program proposal.

The Department is pursuing additional meetings with LAUSD staff members to begin work on this project.

### **Conclusion:**

During October/November of each year LFL completes its annual re-charter process with provider agencies. During this period youth participants and adult leaders renew individual applications and pay required LFL fees to register for the next calendar year. If the board should determine that disassociating with LFL is necessary, the annual LFL re-charter period would serve as a natural transition period. It is expected this period of time would provide adequate time to address the previously identified issues.

The Department has a long-standing history of providing safe and effective youth development programs. LAFD youth programs continue to grow in popularity and are currently serving hundreds of youth participants.

It would seem prudent to continue to utilize the existing services and programs of LFL until the Department transitions to a revised youth program. It would also seem reasonable to allow the City Attorney a final opportunity to provide appropriate direction to all City departments in consideration of the legal issues raised by LAMBDA Legal.

Board report prepared by: Gregory Reynar, Battalion Chief, Employee Relations Office.