

## Communication from Public

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The Office of Mayor, City of Los Angeles  
Los Angeles City Council  
200 North Spring Street Los Angeles, Ca 90012

March 12, 2025

**RE: LAFD V Hours (Budget # 24-117)**

Dear Mayor & City Council:

This letter addresses the possible budget cuts/cutbacks/closure of the Los Angeles Fire Department's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. CERT-LA has been in existence since 1985 and is designed to create an educated and trained cadre of community members who can take care of themselves, their families, and their communities when a major disaster hits the city and professional responders are overwhelmed. This is the top mission of the CERT Team. More recently, the CERT Call Out Team was developed and, on a daily basis, supports the Los Angeles City Fire Department on the scene of major fires, weather events, large area events, and logistical assignments which allows LAFD's members to focus on saving lives and protecting property.

CERT is a force multiplier for the LAFD, just like the Neighborhood Watch Program is for the Los Angeles Police Department. CERT empowers citizens so, if needed, they can assist the Los Angeles CITY Fire Department in their own neighborhoods. You saw the CERT Call Out Team in action and the tremendous value it provided during the Pacific Palisades Fire. We calculated that, in 2024, our Call Out members alone worked an astounding 3000 hours. And those FREE hours directly benefited the City of Los Angeles.

As you know, in a large city like Los Angeles, unfortunately, the only thing that brings us together is some kind of widespread emergency situation like torrential rain, a major earthquake, or giant wildfires that devastate entire communities. Our Mayor and City Council talk about creating "connected communities," and programs like the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) does just that. CERT is a vehicle for citizens to work on a daily basis to keep their communities safe and prepared. The program pulls in Angelinos who, in many cases, are already engaged in their communities and gives them another way to engage other citizens.

CERT helps create "cohesive communities." In the course of our activities, CERT members get out and meet our neighbors before a disaster hits. We appear at neighborhood council meetings, places of worship, community events, and block parties. Through encouraging neighborhood disaster preparedness, we even have spurred communities to form their own block clubs and neighborhood preparedness teams, and engage in a full spectrum of community operations that would not have occurred otherwise.

I have been a member of the CERT team for more than two decades and part of the Call-Out Team for the past few years. In that time, I have been active in the community, leading preparedness training efforts, particularly in my own neighborhood, Westside Village. I talk to groups, participate and assist at team exercises and skills refreshers throughout the city, and organize emergency readiness educational programs. Through these programs, I see diverse Angelenos who otherwise never would have connected with each other learn how to work together for the common good.

The CERT program, by its very nature, is all about inclusion. Our members and the team efforts include communities of color, immigrant communities, the Access Functional Needs community (AFN), all religions, and every other diverse community that exists in our great city. In a world where citizens are divided, CERT is not.

CERT Team members give selflessly of themselves, their time, and their money. We run the CERT program on our own time. Members who worked on the recent Pacific Palisades Fires, for example, took time off from their jobs, canceled vacations, and spent days on end in challenging conditions. We use our own cars to travel between meetings in various neighborhoods, pay for our own uniforms and gear, and even for such minor things like parking at venues when needed.

All of these attributes of the CERT program contribute directly to the City's bottom line through money saved and increased community safety and involvement. CERT links us all together as Angelenos and creates cohesive and safer communities.

In light of the above, I humbly ask that, as you determine the Los Angeles City Budget, you think about what you might lose by defunding the Los Angeles City Fire Department's CERT program to any extent. Even if you cannot precisely quantify the benefits of the CERT program in dollars and cents, you will be able to measure the results of the diminution or loss of the program to the people of the City of Los Angeles in less cohesive and safe neighborhoods.

Respectfully,

Valerie Fontaine

LAFD CERT Member since 1998

Westside Village Neighborhood Team Leader

Call Out Team member