

## 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

**February 28, 2025**

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

Dear Mayor & City Council:

This letter is being written regarding possible budget cuts / cutbacks / closure of the **Los Angeles Fire Department's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program**. As you know, the program has been in existence since 1985 and is designed to create an educated and trained cadre of community residents who will be able to take care of themselves, their immediate families, and their communities during a time when a major disaster hits the city and professional responders are delayed getting to those communities because they are out attempting to do the greatest good for the greatest number. This is mission #1 for those who are part of the CERT Team. Over the years, and as a result of a dedicated membership, the CERT Call Out Team arose 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 allow LAFD's members to "do what they do best" which is to save lives and protect property. The CERT Call Out Team was present and was a key component at the Pacific Palisades Fire which is still fresh in our minds.

Many other comments have been posted to this site over the last few months which extol every aspect of the CERT program. I think that is a wonderful thing especially in these times where the program is up on the proverbial "**chopping block.**" First off, I want to say that **I AM A MEMBER OF THIS TEAM AND HAVE BEEN FOR MORE THAN A DECADE.** In addition to being a coordinator who is regularly in the community talking to groups, conducting team exercises, and working with bodies like our city council, I am also a member of that aforementioned Call Out Team who personally and physically spent 17 days at the Pacific Palisades Fire. I can tell you that this program has proven its worth a hundred times...a thousand times over. My intent, actually is to NOT speak about the program and what it does. I feel that a lot of other comments posted by my CERT colleagues and the public covered those areas adequately. Personally, I want to follow a different path and introduce you to aspects of the program **where a dollar value can't be applied.**

## 2. Contd

I am a native Angeleno...born and bred here as they like to say. I still reside in the neighborhood I was born into. I played in the middle-class streets of Mid City like every other kid would on warm and sunny days. In those days, Los Angeles was a bit of a different place. Neighborhoods were cohesive and everyone knew everyone else. I, laughingly, recount that neighbors knew when you and your friends were being mischievous and had no problem outing you to your parents. We hated it at that time, but in hindsight it made us better kids who grew up into better adults in the long run. Today's Los Angeles is a bit different in that we, in general, don't know our neighbors and don't "mix" with each other. In fact, we go out of our way to stay out of each other's path. The only thing that brings us together is some kind of negative event that we are forced to share like torrential rain that brings down a hillside, an earthquake that devastates a whole area like the one in Northridge did in 1994, or a giant wild fire that devastates and vaporizes an entire community. When those are the only things that bring us together, we know we are in trouble. We're in trouble because, we should have been connected **long before** we were forced to do so. Our Mayor and City Council always talk about creating "connected communities." **Well, I say don't destroy the mechanisms that would do that.**

I submit to you that programs like the **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)** does just that and it does it very well. How? Let us count the ways.

1. ***Brings out engaged and knowledgeable community members.*** This program pulls in citizens who, in many cases, are already engaged in their communities and gives them another tool or plate of opportunities to bring in potentially more engaged citizens. This creates more involved communities who will, on a daily basis, work to keep their communities safe and prepared.
2. ***Brings out only those who want to be there.*** Members of the CERT Team are people who want to be engaged in their communities and give selflessly of their themselves, their time, and their money. When I say we give selflessly of ourselves, we run the CERT program on our own time which comes, in many cases, at the expense of being with family and loved ones. Members who worked the recent Pacific Palisades Fires took time off from their jobs, canceled vacations, and spent days on end in some depressing conditions. In 2024, I believe we calculated that just our Call Out members worked an astounding 3000 hours. All of those FREE hours benefited the City of Los Angeles and no one else. If you asked anyone of these people if they'd do it again, they'd say (as would I) YES. We give of our time on a regular basis by conducting classes and training sessions, neighborhood drills, and even working Call Out assignments like the Pacific Palisades Fire. We give our money to be a part of this by using our own cars to travel between

### 3. Contd

meetings in various neighborhoods. We pay for own uniforms and gear. We even pay for such minor things like parking at venues when needed. Again, all of this comes out of OUR POCKETS. We do it because it is for the greater good and we do it without complaint.

3. ***Creates a force multiplier for our first responders.*** Over the years that the Neighborhood Watch Program has been in existence, it has become a force multiplier for the Los Angeles Police Department and departments across the nation. CERT has done the same by empowering citizens and placing them in a spot where, if needed, they can assist the Los Angeles CITY Fire Department IN THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS. Remember I stated at the top of this letter that first responders, after a disaster, would not be immediately available in our neighborhoods? We are that FORCE MULTIPLIER that will be needed.
4. ***Forces people to KNOW each other.*** Whether we know it or not...people need people. People need people, even more, during disasters. CERT members, naturally, get out and meet their neighbors...even the neighbors who don't want to meet us. We appear at neighborhood council meetings and meet board members. We appear at churches and block parties. We're talking about creating "cohesive communities," well here's one way to do it. By the way, we do it well. The people we meet are always HAPPY to see us and some of them wonder how they have lived SO LONG without being connected to their neighbors. Some of this has spurred communities to form their own block clubs and take up a full mantel of community operations that would have never taken place otherwise.
5. ***Is inclusive of all communities including those who may be disenfranchised or marginalized.*** The CERT program, by its very nature is all about INCLUSION. I'm talking about everything from communities of color, immigrant communities, the Access Functional Needs community (AFN), and every other diverse community that exists in this great city of ours. In a world where we are divided, CERT is not. One more thing, many, if not all of our communities are at ease knowing that some of their first responders, after a disaster, will be THEIR OWN NEIGHBORS.

#### 4. Contd

6. ***Shows us the inside” of emergency services.*** We have perceptions of our emergency services and the people who are part of it. CERT has allowed all of us, myself included, to peek around the “curtain” and see how our emergency services work. Most of our experiences have been with the Los Angeles CITY Fire Department, but we are exposed to a lot more of our city government and operations like the Los Angeles Emergency Management Department, the Los Angeles Police Department, and our CITY COUNCIL OFFICES to name just a few. As a result, we have developed great relationships with all of those bodies and more. We have a better grasp on how they are effective in our communities AND we can educate others while eliminating myths or stereotypes that sometimes are applied to our first responders.
  
7. ***Opens up a whole career path for some.*** CERT, in my years of being a part of the program, has opened up a whole new series of opportunities for our members to either better themselves or go into jobs they didn’t even know they wanted to be in. What do I mean by that? We have had members take the program, like everyone else, and get active in disaster preparation and the Call Out Team. I have personally seen members of our team discover they wanted additional training and skills which allowed them to look at JOB PATHS they never entertained before. Several of our members have become practicing Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) who are working for ambulance companies, the film industry, or for companies that specialize in large area events. Some of those people worked in the area of finance or business prior to their change of career. ALL OF THEM have stated that they did not regret, for a moment, their change of career because it turned out take them where they really WANT TO BE. We have members who are Paramedic grade or studying to be Paramedics. One of them is taking her next set to become a doctor. All of them credit the CERT program for taking them to that level. There are, yet, others who are in the process of working to join our esteemed Los Angeles CITY Fire Department.
  
8. ***Creates a path for youth.*** CERT is a path for youth to get a ground level view of the Emergency Operations world and their place in it. Like the adult members I spoke of in the last point, this is a place youth can look for options and opportunities. We as the members of CERT “pitch” that concept every time we are doing outreach and, guess what? The message is getting through as we regularly are asked by schools (LAUSD, private, and charter) if we can bring them our Teen CERT program.

## 5. Contd

I suppose I could rattle on, but I think you see the points I am making here. For those of you who are about to tell me that everything I have listed really **DOES NOT HAVE A DOLLAR VALUE** that the city can use to calculate its worth or its savings “index.” I will remind you to read the first page of this appeal as I said those were the points I would go after.

Some things, honorable leaders, have great worth, but **you can't quantify it in dollars and cents**. CERT is just that type of program. It does what YOU have asked it to do and that's creating a cohesive and safe communities. It links us all together as Angelenos. It links us all together as a part of the human race. With that said, I humbly ask that as you decide the Los Angeles City Budget, you think about what you might lose by lopping off the head of the Los Angeles City Fire Department's CERT program. As I said, you may not be able to quantify the benefits of the program, but you'll be able to quantify the LOSS of the program to the people of the City of Los Angeles in far lesser cohesive and safe neighborhoods.

Respectfully,

**Chin Thammaesaengsri**

LAFD CERT Member since 2014

Serving the Operations South Bureau Area