



## Emergency Medical Services ARPA Staffing Augmentation Plan

Created: September 24, 2021

### 1. Executive Summary

Lee County has experienced a 23 percent population growth in the last decade. An additional EMS station was added in January 2020 using existing personnel, and the previous personnel allocation to support new EMS resources was made three years ago in FY18/19. Budgets proposals were held as flat as possible through the pandemic based on the highly variable call volume, impacts from changes in tourism, and an undetermined number of new residents. In the FY21/22 budget presentation, Public Safety recommended resources be added in FY22/23 as the impacts are better understood.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in impacts on EMS staffing and workload. Staffing impacts include quarantine and isolation orders and fatigue from the 18 months of response. In the last 90 days, the workload has increased dramatically, with unique incidents in August 2021 up 31 percent over August 2019 alone. Additional personnel funded using American Rescue Plan Act funding would help provide personnel within the system to address sick and vacation time and staffing to add new resources to respond to the pandemic's uncertainty. The Department plans to reduce the long-term reliance on ARPA funds by transitioning staff into future positions needed to address EMS service demands.

### 2. Issue

Since early 2020, Public Safety staff has faced various challenges due to the pandemic, changes in healthcare-seeking behavior, broad economic impacts, and local tourism factors. Early in the pandemic, individuals stopped seeking routine healthcare services at local hospitals and decreased their travel outside of the home, resulting in a decrease in EMS volumes. However, new protective equipment and disinfection requirements during the pandemic offset any reduction in overall volume.

In the summer and winter of 2020, COVID cases surged again. This surge was compounded by an increase in tourism and restoration of typical patterns of healthcare-seeking behavior, resulting in neutral or net increases in call volume compared to 2019. These volumes remained steady until the summer of 2021 when the Delta variant began affecting southwest Florida. EMS experienced double-digit increases in volume, extensive delays at area hospitals, and the closure of the Bayfront Freestanding Emergency Department in Cape Coral to EMS traffic.

EMS staff has been impacted by absenteeism due to quarantine and isolation orders issued by the Florida Department of Health. This absenteeism has left more work to be done by fewer employees. This impact is especially true in the last 90 days, as the organization has felt the most dramatic COVID effects.

The long-term impacts of exhaustion, mental health, and compassion fatigue from the last 18 months will have to be remedied over many months and years. This plan will include additional time off for our employees, mental and physical wellness support, and shifting the busiest stations from 24-hour shifts to two back-to-back 12-hour shifts.

### 3. Business Opportunity

The Department proposes two specific business opportunities to resolve the issues described above.

#### A. Short-term staffing augmentation using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding

The increased workload has continued as COVID cases have started to decline in September 2021. For the past 18 months, EMS staff have worked at over anticipated volumes in hot personal protective equipment. This workload has resulted in fatigue and the need for time off for rest. The addition of 21 employees will allow for the increased opportunity for time off without impacting operational readiness.

This phase consists of 18 EMT/Paramedic positions and three Lieutenants. County Administration, Public Safety, Economic Development, Human Resources, and Hodges University have worked on an apprenticeship program. In addition to the usual hiring of certified applicants, this program will allow the rapid training and onboarding of non-certified applicants.

#### B. Long-term (36-month) transition of employees from ARPA funding to General Fund budget

Growth in the community in the last two years and continued population migration to Southwest Florida will necessitate the addition of new resources into the EMS system. The plan includes the addition of peak-hour

ambulances during the day and resources to help respond to emergencies in areas like Corkscrew Road, where growth has occurred. The employees identified above will transfer to the General Fund by implementing these ambulances and resources to transfer all positions to the General Fund by the end of FY23/24.

#### 4. Project Goals

1. Improves responder health and safety by providing sufficient staffing for vacation approvals
2. Improves the performance of the system by adding resources to respond to emergencies
3. Provides for a seamless transition of resources to augment COVID response to long-term needs
4. Allows for the implementation of job training programs to improve opportunities for the unemployed

#### 5. Costs

##### Item A: 21 ARPA-funded positions

18 EMT/Paramedic positions	\$1,550,592 annually
3 Lieutenants	\$309,735 annually

##### Item B: Capital items in FY22/23

3 Ambulances	\$588,000
1 Supervisor vehicle	\$65,000

#### 6. Cost-Benefit Analysis

The most significant risk facing EMS agencies is the loss of staffing due to various pandemic-related factors. These include workload, compensation, working conditions, and health risks. The steps outlined above will provide rapid relief to most of these, helping to retain employees and recruit new employees to work in an improving environment.

As the community grows in the coming years, positions will be absorbed into the existing growth plans for EMS. This is recommended to include one 24-hour ambulance and one 12-hour ambulance in FY22/23, which would require 10 FTEs.

#### 7. Anticipated Outcomes

1. Provide staffing relief to allow appropriate staffing of ambulances and improve workload distribution across available resources.
2. Improve opportunities for employees to take vacation leave to recover after the extended pandemic response.
3. Expand the number of resources in the system in Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 to account for growth and potential lingering pandemic impacts.

#### 8. Recommendation

Move forward with both phases of the plan, including immediately authorizing 21 FTEs (18 EMTs, 3 EMS Lieutenants) in Public Safety.

#### 9. Policy Direction from Board

None.