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June 17, 2024

Eugene D. Seroka, General Manager
Port of Los Angeles
P.O. Box 151
San Pedro, CA 90731-0151

Dear Mr. Seroka:

Justification for Six Fire Captains on Small Boats

In order to enhance maritime safety and emergency response capabilities, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) respectfully requests the Port of Los Angeles to fund six Fire Captain positions on two LAFD small fire boats, thereby ensuring the protection of the port's critical infrastructure and the surrounding community. Currently, a supervisory mate performs the duties of a supervisor and boat operator. As maritime traffic increases and industrial activities increase, having dedicated, highly trained fireboat captains will enable swift, effective responses to fires, hazardous material spills, and other emergencies while improving firefighter safety. As a result of this investment, the country's busiest container port will be able to safeguard its assets and operations, as well as strengthen its overall security and resilience, fostering trust and reliability among trade partners across the globe.

It was identified that the first marine fire boat responders to the Baltimore bridge collapse were overwhelmed due to the absence of incident command capabilities resulting from the lack of Captains on the fire boats. Consequently, they were unable to effectively coordinate other marine resources, given the overwhelming span of control from the immediate response of numerous assisting resources. This situation led to independent actions by marine operators, which resulted in a lack of incident coordination and jeopardized firefighter safety, critical decision-making, and missed radio communications.

There is a critical need to have Fire Officers at all LAFD small boat Fire Stations. Currently two of the five fire boats have a Supervising Mate (Super Mate) that operates the vessel, supervises operations and coordinates agencies during emergency operation, each station has three platoons and one Super Mate per platoon for a total of six Super Mates. Given the proximity of LAFD Fire Boat #1 and #5 located on the outer harbor areas of the Port of Los Angeles and their ability to respond rapidly to a given area within the port as a first-on-scene resource, firefighter safety is at risk without an assigned Fire Captain onboard. Firefighting on the waters of the Port of Los Angeles poses unique challenges that demand seasoned leadership and expertise. With the unpredictable nature of maritime emergencies,

from ship fires to rescue operations, having a Fire Captain on board is not just a matter of protocol; it is about ensuring the highest level of safety, coordination, and effective response.

Imagine navigating through dense fog, battling flames engulfing a vessel, or conducting a complex cliff rescue operation in choppy seas. In these high-pressure scenarios, the guidance of a Fire Captain, with years of experience and training under their belt, becomes the beacon of assurance for the entire crew. A Fire Captain brings a wealth of knowledge in firefighting tactics, risk assessment, and emergency management. They are the ones who can swiftly analyze the situation, make critical decisions, and coordinate seamlessly with other agencies. Their presence isn't just about giving orders; it is about instilling confidence, providing direction, and ensuring that every member of the team performs at their best.

The responsibility for the Supervising Mate is to operate the vessel and supervise a dive operation. Because of these essential duties, the ability to ensure command and control of a water-related incident is an over-taxing and unsafe task for a Supervising Mate, which directly compromises firefighter safety. Having an assigned Fire Captain would ensure the ability to ensure safe incident decision-making, including maintaining continuous critical radio communications, coordination with other agencies/resources, and developing appropriate incident action plans and tactical objectives for incident mitigation.

The absence of a Captain supervisor onboard an LAFD fire boat presents significant challenges in leadership, decision-making, oversight, navigation, resource allocation, and training. It is essential to ensure that fire boats are adequately staffed with qualified personnel, including experienced Captains, to mitigate these challenges and ensure the safety and effectiveness of emergency response operations on the water.

Duties and responsibilities of Fire boat Captain:

Leadership and Supervision

- Command the fire boat and lead the crew during operations.
- Oversee daily activities and training of fire boat personnel.
- Ensure all crew members adhere to safety protocols and standard operating procedures.

Emergency Response

- Direct firefighting operations on water, including fire suppression and search and rescue missions.
- Coordinate with other emergency services and agencies during maritime incidents.
- Assess emergency situations and develop strategic plans for effective response.

Incident Command

- Take charge of the scene during multi-agency maritime incidents.
- Communicate effectively with command centers and other responding units.
- Implement incident action plans and adjust tactics as necessary during operations.

Equipment Maintenance and Readiness

- Ensure the fire boat and all equipment are maintained and in operational condition.
- Conduct regular inspections and drills to maintain readiness.

- Manage the inventory of firefighting and medical supplies on the boat.

Training and Development

- Conduct training sessions for the crew on fire suppression techniques, maritime safety, and rescue operations.
- Mentor and evaluate the performance of crew members.
- Keep up-to-date with advancements in firefighting technology and techniques.

Administrative Duties

- Prepare and maintain logs, reports, and records related to boat operations and incidents.
- Manage schedules and assignments for fire boat personnel.
- Ensure compliance with local, state, and federal regulations pertaining to maritime operations.

Community Relations

- Engage in public education and outreach programs regarding fire safety and maritime hazards.
- Represent the fire department at community events and meetings.
- Foster positive relationships with local marinas, harbor authorities, and the maritime community.

By funding six fireboat captains, the LAFD will enhance fireboat safety and efficiency. These captains will play a crucial role in ensuring that the boat crews are well-trained and supervised and that the boats themselves are properly maintained and operated. This investment will ultimately help the LAFD deliver the highest level of fire safety services to the port and the community, ensuring our ongoing commitment to public safety. Thank you for your consideration in funding these Fire Captain positions for the Los Angeles City Fire Department.

Sincerely,



KRISTIN M. CROWLEY
Fire Chief