



Texas Commission on Fire Protection

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Dear members of the Texas Fire Service,

The Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP) has submitted our FY24-25 Legislative Appropriations Request which totals \$5,753,878.00. This includes five exceptional items which equal a \$1,990,902 increase in operating expenses. It is imperative that I express the situation this agency is struggling with, as we work to meet our mission and performance measures. The agency's responsibility has increased while resources to accomplish the mission have decreased.

At the same time, revenue generated has continued to increase. TCFP is required by law to generate revenue that exceeds our General Appropriations. While our operating costs for the FY24-25 biennium equals \$3,762,976.00 there is a \$1.5 million budget rider attached that requires TCFP to generate \$5,262,976.00. Based on current projections, we will generate more than \$9.1 million. These additional expenses would enable us to serve you better.

Explanation of FY24-25 Exceptional Requests;

Exceptional Request One (1) - 10% Salary increase for existing staff

The request is to provide for a 10% salary increase for 29 FTEs requiring an increase of \$325,046. The number of FTEs at the agency, has continued to decrease over the years as the number of certified regulated entities and firefighters has continued to increase and the salaries for the staff appear lower than those at like sized agencies. Our ability to retain qualified staff has become extremely difficult based on current salaries and workload.

Exceptional Request Two (2) - 5% restoration = Two vacant FTEs

The request is to restore \$188,578. The restoration of the 5% reduction which occurred in 2021 would enable the agency to fill two vacant FTE positions that have remained vacant since the reduction. TCFP is authorized to maintain 29 FTEs however the reduction in 2021 resulted in two vacant positions due to lack of funding. The 2022 customer survey included numerous complaints about diminished customer service resulting in delays for regulated entities to reach required staffing levels. TCFP is also charged with maintaining and updating the curriculum for firefighter training and testing. We currently offer 15 different firefighter certifications and are developing new curriculums each year to meet the demand for professional credentialing of the Texas Fire Service. This curriculum generally comes from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) however many of the new certifications being developed lack any curriculum at this time. An added challenge is due to the NFPA recently beginning the consolidation of

their certification curriculums into multi-disciplined editions which will result in the revision and modification of over 85% of the current editions in use by TCFP during the next five years.

One of the two vacant FTE positions is in the Training/Testing Division to address curriculum revisions, record reviews and the delivery and auditing of training as well as the performance and compliance of the Certified Training Facilities across the state. Currently there is one FTE assigned to our Certification Division who is tasked to also handle all Curriculum matters. We have one FTE for exam grading and challenges. We average over 7,000 exams per quarter. We also have one FTE assigned to conduct Training facility audits. There are more than 293 Training Facilities and we average 10 audits per quarter. This all falls under the supervision of a Division Chief who handles record reviews, which average 100 per quarter, exam scheduling and delivery and assists with the other outlined duties as needed.

The second vacant FTE position is in our IT Division. We are currently using 2017 technology system for all testing, certification, injury reporting, continuing education records verification and information management. This system was mandated in 2011 however never funded. In 2022, we committed three weeks to required updates of the On-Line Testing System which required a complete shutdown of all testing and the staff time of three FTEs. Restoration of this FTE would allow staff the ability to enhance and maintain the Technology system and transition to a Mobile application for all certified firefighters to use.

Exceptional Request Three (3) – Purchase of Agency Vehicles

This is a request for an additional \$651,364 of which \$588,964 would be a one-time expenditure for the purchase of the vehicles, the remaining \$22,000 would be a recurring expense for annual maintenance, fuel and insurance. We also recommend a five to ten-year vehicle replacement schedule with estimated recurring expenses at \$100,000 every other biennium.

TCFP is requesting the purchase of **eleven** SUV type vehicles for use by agency staff while conducting state business. At present TCFP has eight FTEs assigned to the Compliance Division of the agency. Seven are assigned to one of the seven Compliance Regions of the state while the 8th FTE serves as the Chief of the Compliance Division and assists in all seven of the regions. These eight FTEs are responsible for the annual Compliance Inspections of 1,000 regulated fire service entities. They also are charged with proctoring certification exams, training facility audits, injury investigations, complaint investigations and coordinating TIFMAS activities during large scale activations. These FTEs travel over 100,000 miles each, annually, to conduct their required duties. The lack of state vehicles requires the acquisition of rental vehicles or the use of personal vehicles. Due to the difficulties in attaining reliable rental vehicles, the use of personal vehicles has continually increased.

At the same time, we have one FTE assigned to conduct training facility audits and assist with testing as well as staffing educational booths during large Fire Service conferences and symposiums. These duties require a significant amount of travel annually. At the same time, the Agency Chief along with other FTEs regularly travel to stakeholder meetings, regional agency meetings and regulated entities to conduct business and deliver information. The addition of these eleven vehicles would significantly improve the abilities of agency staff while conducting state business and increase efficiencies across the agency.

Currently, when travel is required, these FTEs are required to rent vehicles to facilitate this travel. The rental process presents multiple challenges including a situation when often times, no vehicles are

available. It also adds significant time and documentation for each inspection/audit and or investigations being conducted and increases the time required for these FTEs to complete their assignments.

Regarding the cost comparisons for the purchase of vehicles versus continuing the rental process, historically, the agency has averaged 85,000 driving miles per year (2017-2020) with an increase to 95,000 in 2021. During 2020, **transportation expenses were averaging \$48,000 vs an estimated \$29,600 with agency vehicles.** The total agency mileage looks to be increasing to the level of between 95-100k per year. The agency's total cost for 2021 mileage reimbursements, rentals and gas was **\$48,000 yearly**. Based on mileage rates of 18 miles/gallon with fuel cost at \$4.50 would be **\$21,200 in fuel yearly**. Cost of ownership for eleven agency vehicles would place cost of ownership and insurance at \$7,000 - \$9,000 yearly, respectively.

Exceptional Request Four (4) - Additional FTE positions

This is a request for \$775,200 to enable the agency to hire six (6) new FTE positions to assist with managing the increased demand in Compliance, Certification, IT and administrative work for the agency as a whole.

TCFP currently has 29 FTE positions however two have remained vacant due to the 5% reduction in 21-22. (See Exceptional Request #2) The agency is understaffed and experiencing difficulty in keeping up with the current growth being experienced in the Texas Fire Service. Six additional FTE positions are needed to allow the agency to get in front of the growing demands placed on the agency.

The Certification Division is responsible for managing and assisting the more than 38,000 certified firefighters with their certification upgrades and renewals each year. Certification renewal is required annually which generates a significant portion of the agency's revenue. TCFP is also required to conduct random audits of continuing education hours for the more than 15,000 individual certificate holders. We continually receive customer complaints about the time it takes to process certifications, which is negatively impacting fire departments trying to maintain/increase their local staffing levels and ensuring proper certifications for all firefighters. Two additional Certification FTE positions would serve to enhance our capabilities and customer service.

Currently, in our Compliance Division, there are seven (7) regional Compliance Officers supervised by one Division Chief. This division is responsible for the annual Compliance inspections of over 1,000 regulated fire service entities. Due to staffing shortages in all divisions, the Compliance division is also charged with proctoring certification exams, conducting training facility audits, injury investigations, complaint investigations and assisting with the coordination of TIFMAS resources during large scale activations. These Compliance Officers work out of their residences and travel their regions weekly.

Since 2020, we have added more than 50 regulated fire service entities. With the increase in regulated entities and the overall number of certified firefighters, the workload continues to increase for each Regional Compliance Officer. Two additional Certification FTE positions would serve to enhance our capabilities.

As this agency's workload continues to increase, there is a need for two Staff Services Officer positions. Curriculum changes and the subsequent rule changes combined with the increased amount of Injury Reporting, Technology System workload, Training/Testing & Certification workload and Compliance workload, the agency struggles to accomplish all the documentation required. Currently, staff spends an

equal amount of time documenting activities and accomplishing the required services we provide. Two Administrative positions would serve to enhance our documentation capabilities across all divisions.

Exceptional Request Five (5) - Increase salary limit for Executive Director to \$149,000

This is a request for an additional \$50,714

The Commissioners request an increase of the authorized salary for the Agency Chief. Currently, the Chief falls into the Group 3 classification with a range of 92,600 - \$149,240 and a salary cap of \$123,883. Currently, the funded salary cap of \$123,883 has been reached. The Commissioners feel that it is important to have the flexibility and funding required to set this salary at a competitive level to retain qualified, capable individuals. The request is to increase and fund this salary cap to \$149,240, while re-classifying the Agency Chief to Group 5.

Respectfully,

Mike Wisko

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Agency Chief