



NEWS RELEASE

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California Counties Will Recover Taxpayer Costs For Search and Rescues Triggered by Criminal Conduct

OCFA Board Supported Legislation Signed Into Law

Irvine – A new state law, supported by OCFA’s Board of Directors, will allow counties to recover costs from people convicted of crimes that required their rescue. The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) Board of Directors voted unanimously in March to support AB 896, authored by California Assemblyman Donald Wagner (R-Irvine).

OCFA Board Chairman Gene Hernandez said, “We welcome the new law as part of our ongoing effort to be as efficient as possible with funds entrusted to us by our cities.” He added, “Recovering some of the costs from having to rescue people because of their criminal acts is the least we can do for our taxpayers.”

The new law, which goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2016, will allow counties to recover the costs associated with the search and rescue of individuals whose incident was the result of their violation of local, state, or federal law. The law will cap recovery costs at \$12,000, unless the violation is a felony, for which there is no limit. There must be a conviction before a county may seek restitution.

“This law will help us recover some of the costs associated with having to rescue people who engage in reckless or intentional conduct,” said OCFA Board Director and Orange County Board of Supervisors Chairman Todd Spitzer. He added, “When we launch a taxpayer-funded search and rescue operation it should be to help people who are truly in need of our help, not to rescue people who have put themselves and others in danger with their reckless and illegal acts.”

The legislation was introduced at Supervisor Spitzer’s instigation. It followed a Trabuco Canyon search and rescue operation in the supervisor’s third district that lasted several days in order to locate two Costa Mesa teenagers. Multiple law enforcement agencies were involved at a cost of more than \$160,000. One of the teenagers was later convicted of methamphetamine possession.

“It’s been said many times before, search and rescue missions should be funded by the government for accidents, but in cases of intentionally reckless and dangerous behavior, taxpayers should not be on the hook for hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Wagner. “I’m pleased that after making a few minor changes to ensure due process, the governor agreed and signed this important bill into law.”

Under the law, anyone 16 years of age or older who is convicted of a crime that necessitated their rescue, will be liable for search and rescue costs, including but not limited to; use of vehicles, aircraft, emergency medical costs, and the salaries of employees.

For more information about OCFA, visit www.ocfa.org.

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The OCFA is a joint powers authority that serves more than 1.8 million residents in 23 cities and the unincorporated areas of the county.