August 27, 2014

The Honorable Jerry Brown
Office of the Governor
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: California State 9-1-1 System Dysfunction

Dear Governor Brown:

The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Medical Directors Association of California is the professional association of physician medical directors of California Local EMS Agencies and EMS provider agencies throughout the state. Our members are responsible for oversight of the emergency medical care of 9-1-1/EMS patients.

We want to bring to your attention a serious problem we see with the 9-1-1 system in California. This problem may, according to estimates from published medical studies, be causing the deaths of hundreds and perhaps thousands of persons each year.

Today 80% of 9-1-1 calls are made via wireless devices, and in most cases the exact location of the caller is not immediately known. These calls are typically routed to a California Highway Patrol Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). The caller is queried, the location determined, and the caller is transferred to a local dispatch center.

This multiple-step process to meet the needs of wireless 9-1-1 callers results in delays in both the arrival of EMS responders and in the provision of important medical care instructions delivered by dispatchers. Call delays and transfers also increase stress and confusion, and may result in disconnected calls or hang-ups, depriving dispatchers and responders of essential information. Minutes count in EMS, and these 9-1-1 inefficiencies can easily make the difference between life and death, or between functional and vegetative outcomes, in our most critical patients.

There is a readily available solution that would reduce these delays and significantly improve our 9-1-1 system. The Wireless Optimization Service uses the technology and procedures of the Routing by Empirical Data (RED) project. The service examines individual cell sectors, maps the historical
location of wireless 9-1-1 calls, and determines the most appropriate PSAP for future calls. For a projected cost of $3.5 million per year for three years, every wireless sector in the state can be optimized.

Californians are suffering and dying daily from delays in EMS responses. It is essential that our 9-1-1 system be given every chance to do what the public should and does expect – to save lives by responding to emergencies as quickly and efficiently as possible. That will require the accurate and efficient routing of wireless 9-1-1 calls. We strongly encourage the immediate deployment of available technology to make that happen.

Sincerely,

Gregory H. Gilbert, M.D., FAAEM
President

Fact Sheet:

• In cardiac arrest, the likelihood of survival decreases by 7-10% for every minute delay to defibrillation (electrical shock)
• Dispatchers can instruct callers to perform life-saving procedures. Dispatcher-directed CPR doubles the survival rate of cardiac arrest victims, and the Heimlich Maneuver can provide relief from choking.
• In a study in an urban area, mortality for the most seriously ill or injured patients was shown to increase linearly - from 5% with a 4-5 minute EMS response interval to nearly 10% with an 8-9 minute response.
• In another study of over 70,000 patients, a 1-minute shorter EMS response interval was associated with a 17% reduction (6% to 5%) in patient mortality.

More detailed information is available at www.emdac.org/911dysfunction.

cc: Senate Public Safety Committee
    Assembly Sub 5 Public Safety Committee
    Assembly Committee on Public Safety
    Assembly Select Committee on Local Emergency Preparedness
    Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Management
    Mark Ghilarducci, Director, OES