

Response to Questions on the FY 2011 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Foust

Question: Please provide additional detail and justification for the funding and nine additional merit positions included in the FY 2011 Advertised Budget Plan in the Health Department.

Response: The FY 2011 Advertised Budget Plan includes 9/9.0 SYE positions for public health preparedness activities in the Health Department. Eight of these new positions were formerly funded through temporary funding sources however the use of grant positions, in which the funding source is uncertain long term, and limited term positions, that require a break in service, does not provide the agency with adequate staffing to meet the need for a sustained response to public health preparedness needs. Of these positions, five positions were formerly funded with a three-year Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant which expired in fall 2009. In addition, another three merit positions will be created in lieu of existing limited term positions.

Since the fall of 2001, the Health Department has actively advanced the development of new strategies and networks to enable the County to anticipate and respond effectively to rapidly evolving and complex public health challenges. The recent loss of a critical grant from the state, combined with the emergence of new public health threats including the H1N1 influenza A virus, led the Health Department to critically evaluate its staff resources. This evaluation showed a lack of flexibility for a sustained response to regular public health emergencies (such as neurovirus outbreaks, measles outbreaks) or appropriate planning and response capacity for any pandemic.

In order to address this gap, the creation of 9/9.0 SYE new positions will allow the Health Department to strengthen its critical infrastructure through enhanced integration of local public health system assets in order to better support and sustain both routine service delivery and emergency public health response activities and to actively advance the development of new strategies and networks to enable the County to anticipate and respond effectively to rapidly evolving and complex public health challenges. The continuation of permanent staffing for this critical outreach is essential to allow the Health Department to continue its efforts in community preparedness and to work with the community to increase their capacity in dealing with important health issues. The three limited term positions are needed for support for critical volunteer outreach and training, and database management, grant management, as well as the development of the department's educational material relating to general public health, emerging diseases and public health threats. Lack of permanent staffing for these limited term positions negatively impacts Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteer relations and disrupts volunteer outreach, recruitment and training; jeopardizes the agency's ability to manage a wide array of grant funding streams and provide oversight of crucial databases; diminishes the agency's capacity to coordinate staffing and communication during an emergency as well as impacts adequate support during outbreak situations. In FY 2008, there were 3,682 active MRC volunteers, with recruitment of new volunteers slightly outpacing attrition.

The new positions allow the agency to optimize its service delivery by leveraging critical community assets, provide relevant population based interventions, strengthen its infrastructure to respond to ongoing public health requirements such as childhood obesity, chronic disease and food safety, manage emergency disease outbreaks such as H1N1 and respond effectively to rapidly evolving and complex public health challenges. The County's recent response to a region wide outbreak of the measles and the intervention required as a result of the ongoing H1N1 pandemic have highlighted the difficulty of sustaining long term service requirements and meeting concurrent public health emergencies without additional staff. This level of effort can not be continued long term, particularly as the agency is likely to face new and critical public health requirements in the future. It should be noted that as of January 2010 69,381 H1N1 vaccinations have been given, 13,713 phone calls have been recorded at the H1N1 call center, four deaths have been recorded in Fairfax County as a result of the H1N1 virus and approximately five percent of the County's population have received urgent care/services visits for influenza like illnesses.

These positions were requested at the *FY 2009 Carryover Review* process and deferred by the Board of Supervisors for decision as part of the FY 2011 budget development process.