

NEWS

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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
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County firefighters make sacrifices to preserve service

The County's firefighters today voted overwhelmingly to accept benefit reductions that will help preserve public services and balance the County's budget.

"Our firefighters are to be commended for putting public safety and public service first," said Board of Supervisors Chair Josie Gonzales. "The current economic climate is hard on everyone, including our firefighters and their families. The leadership they've displayed makes their sacrifice particularly heroic."

The members of San Bernardino County Professional Firefighters Local 935, which is made up of the County's 344 firefighters, fire captains and fire engineers, voted 98 percent in favor of accepting the concessions when their contract goes into effect July 2. The concessions will save the County an estimated \$2.14 million annually.

The concessions are nearly identical to those approved earlier this month by the Board of Supervisors for the County's 537 exempt employees, which will save an estimated \$5.7 million.

The concessions accepted by the County's firefighters include a 7 percent salary reduction achieved through a reduced retirement pickup, a 50 percent reduction in salary step increases, and a capped medical subsidy that will no longer apply toward retirement calculations.

The concession for both the firefighters and exempt employees will take effect only if all other employee groups accept similar concessions, which would result in total savings of more than \$30 million. The county is currently in negotiations with specialized peace officers, public attorneys, probation officers, and some special districts employees.

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County Chief Executive Officer Greg Devereaux has briefed the boards of the San Bernardino Public Employees Association and the San Bernardino County Safety Employees Benefit Association on the County's dire budget outlook and will be initiating discussions regarding similar concessions. SBPEA and SEBA combined represent more than 70 percent of the County's workforce.

Mr. Devereaux has stated that a failure to achieve these savings will make it impossible for the County to avoid severe cuts to vital public services, including public safety, and a significant number of layoffs.