

Letter From The President, Cal-AAMS.

Commentary from CALmatters: Guest Commentary | June 3, 2019  
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### **New Budget Omits An Important Piece Of California's Disaster Preparedness**

California's 70 emergency air ambulance helicopters and airplanes cover nearly 164,000 square miles and serve more than 37 million Californians in their time of need.

To protect newborns and their mothers, air ambulances evacuated an entire neonatal unit at a Redding Hospital and transported the patients to UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento during devastating Carr Fire in 2018. Air ambulances fly injured firefighters and residents to burn centers to receive the urgent, life-saving care they needed.

Inexplicably, the state budget process has left out support for air ambulance. The emergency services provided by air ambulances could disappear if a funding stream that expires at the end of this year is not replaced in the pending state budget.

Imagine no air ambulances available as a resource to firefighters who are on the front lines, or to hospitals facing evacuation when threatened with a coming wall of fire, or to critical patients in rural or remote areas who suffer a heart attack or stroke. Access to life-saving rapid air ambulance transport may be their only hope.

Last year, the Legislature unanimously approved funding for air ambulances. Health Access, the Western Center on Law & Poverty, the Rural County Representatives of California, the California Children's Hospital Association, the California Hospital Association, the California Fire Chiefs Association all supported that legislation.

Funding comes from a fee on certain traffic tickets. But that fee that will cease at the end of December. Then-Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed the 2018 legislation and requested that funding be addressed in the 2019-2020 state budget being negotiated now.

Yet here we are, in the final days of budget hearings before the next spending plan takes effect on July 1, and new funding has not been appropriated. Unless air ambulance is added to the state budget, we will have no choice but to pursue legislation, the very route rejected by our previous governor.

The cost of updating the 25 year old rates to something closer to the cost of providing the service would be about \$17 million. This cost is not insignificant, but these services are essential, and must be accessible to all Californians.

If the Legislature does not act to assure a supplemental funding source, air medical bases across the state will face some tough decisions on how to stay in operation with insufficient, reduced capabilities - Worse, some rural bases may be forced to close.

As climate change-related disasters worsen, we need to be doing more—not less—to ensure our communities are prepared for emergencies.

Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a state of emergency to get California prepared for coming natural disasters, such as fire. How could life-saving air ambulances not be part of that future?

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