

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING  
AB 1863 (DeMaio)  
As Amended April 27, 2026  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Prohibits fire protection district boards from charging fees to anyone who calls 911 emergency telephone number unless emergency services are provided.

### Major Provisions

Prohibits a fire district board from charging a fee to any member of the public for either of the following:

- 1) Using a 911 emergency telephone number.
- 2) Emergency responders arriving at a location or otherwise responding to the use of a 911 emergency telephone number unless emergency services are provided.

Specifies a district board may still charge a fee for a prank call.

## COMMENTS

*Fire Protection District Law of 1987:* California's Fire Protection District Law of 1987 provides the principal statutory framework for the formation, governance, powers, and financing of many independent fire protection districts in the state. The law authorizes districts to deliver a range of fire and emergency services, including fire suppression, rescue response, hazardous materials response, emergency medical support, fire prevention, inspections, and public education. It also establishes procedures for district boundaries, annexations, consolidations, elections, boards of directors, and contracts with cities, counties, or other agencies for service delivery. "First responder fees" or local public-safety fee programs generally refer to charges, assessments, taxes, or cost-recovery mechanisms used by local agencies to fund fire, EMS, paramedic, or emergency response capacity. These charges are possible through the Fire Protection District Law.

*First Responder Fees / Fee Programs:* "First responder fees" or local public-safety fee programs generally refer to charges, assessments, taxes, or cost-recovery mechanisms used by local agencies to fund fire, EMS, paramedic, or emergency response capacity. In California, these mechanisms can take multiple forms: parcel taxes, special taxes, benefit assessments, property-related fees, ambulance transport charges, inspection fees, development impact fees, or contractual service charges. Which legal pathway is available depends on how the charge is structured and what service it funds.

First responder fees help local fire departments and emergency agencies recover the direct costs of providing advanced emergency medical response, particularly when firefighters or paramedic engine companies arrive before an ambulance. In many communities, emergency medical calls make up the majority of fire department responses, requiring trained personnel, medical equipment, vehicles, and around-the-clock staffing. Property tax revenues and general fund dollars often do not fully cover these expanding service demands, especially as call volumes rise

and equipment and labor costs increase. As a result, some jurisdictions use first responder fees as a targeted cost-recovery mechanism tied to actual medical incidents rather than relying solely on broad-based taxes.

These fees exist because emergency medical responses increasingly function as a healthcare service as well as a public-safety service. Firefighters frequently provide on-scene medical assessments, stabilization, lifesaving interventions, and patient handoffs before transport occurs, creating costs that may not otherwise be reimbursed if only the ambulance provides bills for care. State law in California allows certain public agencies to charge for these first responder services, and many agencies bill insurance rather than seeking full payment directly from residents. Other entities, including the Benicia Fire Department and El Dorado County Fire Protection District, similarly describe first responder fees as a way to support EMS operations and offset costs not covered by traditional tax revenues.<sup>1</sup>

### **According to the Author**

Californians should be able to not fear calling 911 for a medical emergency, but multiple cities throughout the state have begun to implement fees when calling 911. By enacting fees, many Californians see these costs as financial barriers to receiving lifesaving care and putting lives at risk. It is imperative that there be no financial burdens or hurdles when simply deciding to call 911 for a medical emergency, and that Californians know that calling 911 is the best thing to do, rather than prioritizing financial safety over real physical safety.

### **Arguments in Support**

None on file.

### **Arguments in Opposition**

None on file.

## **FISCAL COMMENTS**

Local revenue loss of an unknown amount, potentially in excess of \$150,000, to the extent this bill results in reduced first responder fees that help boards recover the direct costs of providing emergency response services. Although such local revenue loss is not a reimbursable cost to the state, reduced fee revenues create cost pressures, not only for the direct services funded by those fees, but also for other local services, which in turn creates General Fund (GF) cost pressures to backfill these specific local services.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of GF structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

## **VOTES**

### **ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 6-0-1**

**YES:** Ransom, Hadwick, Arambula, Bennett, Calderon, DeMaio

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Bains

### **ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0**

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<sup>1</sup> First Responder Fee, The City of Benicia <https://www.ci.benicia.ca.us/firstresponderfee>

**YES:** Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

**UPDATED**

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