

NEWS

LA Council votes to place sales-tax hike on ballot to fund LAFD



Council Chambers at Los Angeles City Hall on Wednesday, June 14, 2023. (Photo by Dean Musgrove, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)



By **CITY NEWS SERVICE** | news@socal

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The Los Angeles City Council on Tuesday authorized the placement of a measure on the November ballot that would hike the city's sales tax by a half-cent to provide added funding to the Los Angeles Fire Department.

In a 14-0 vote, the council approved the measure, which was proposed by the United Firefighters of Los Angeles City. The union, which represents the city's firefighters, submitted more than 225,000 signatures to qualify it for the ballot.

Councilwoman Traci Park was absent during the vote. The matter was approved without discussion from council members.

Doug Coates, the president of UFLAC, urged the council to support the measure.

“We’re asking you today to basically take one step and support this initiative ordinance to fund LAFD, and let the voters decide in November,” Coates said.

“This ballot measure will provide new revenue that is dedicated entirely to the fire department for staffing stations and equipment. The LAFD is nearly half the size it should be to protect our nearly 4 million people,” he added.

Proponents estimate the tax would generate at least \$345 million in the first year.

The sales tax rate in Los Angeles is currently 9.75%. If approved by voters, the measure would raise it to 10.25% — below the 10.5% rates in Alhambra, Burbank, Glendale, Long Beach, Pasadena, San Fernando and West Hollywood, and the 10.75% rates in Culver City and Santa Monica, according to supporters.

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Opponents, however, say the tax rate is already too high, and hits low-income residents the hardest.

The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association previously criticized the proposed tax, noting that voters placed tax payer protections in the state constitution with Proposition 13 in 1978 and Proposition 218 in 1996. These require local taxes for a special purpose to be approved by two-thirds of voters.

Beginning in 2017, state courts ruled that those rules do not apply to “citizen initiative tax increases,” according to the association.

“Voters should ask, ‘What is in the city budget that is a higher priority than adequately funding the fire department?’ It is totally unacceptable that the City Council and mayor have underfunded the fire department and essentially told the firefighters’ union to go out and get their own tax increase,” the association said in a statement.

“Sales taxes are already very high in Los Angeles, and they hit hardest on people who can least afford to pay more.”

The UFLAC argues that the new source of revenue would address decades of underinvestment. The union has said that the LAFD currently operates with the same number of firefighters as in the 1960s, six fewer stations, and five times the call load.

Revenue generated by the half-cent increase would allow the department to hire additional firefighters and civilian employees, purchase new apparatus and equipment, and build and repair fire stations, according to supporters.

The revenue would be placed in a special fund dedicated exclusively to the LAFD. The measure would also include a “maintenance of effort” provision requiring the city to continue providing general fund support for the department, preventing existing funding from being supplanted by sales tax revenue.

The proposal would also require annual public audits and create a citizens oversight committee to monitor how the tax revenue is spent.

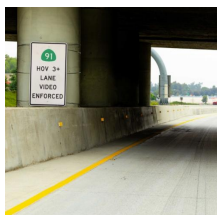
The union has also cited aging infrastructure as a concern, saying dozens of fire stations are more than 50 years old, including several that are more than 80 years old.

“The LAFD is half the size needed to keep LA safe,” organizers said. “That’s why LAFD firefighters and paramedics are appealing directly to voters to provide funding for staffing, facilities, and equipment.”

Union officials said they believe voters will support the measure because many Angelenos recognize the department is understaffed and in need of additional resources, particularly in the wake of the January 2025 wildfires. They also expressed confidence that the measure’s provisions would ensure transparency and establish clear guidelines for how the revenue could be spent.

LAFD officials have said more funding is needed to meet requirements set by the International Association of Fire Fighters. The organization conducted a review of the department that found the LAFD needs 62 new fire stations, 4,000 additional firefighters, dozens of new dispatchers, seven new battalions, and emergency management service substations.

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