

May 14, 2025

Mayor Karen Bass  
City Council, Districts 1-15  
Chief Legislative Analyst  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Budget and Finance Committee

My name is Mike Castillo, and I recently retired from the Los Angeles City Fire Department after serving for 40-years. I am also a resident of the City of Los Angeles.

In 1998, the LAFD underwent budget cuts and Emergency Incident Technicians (EIT's) were eliminated. EIT's are specially trained Firefighters who respond with a Battalion Chief to all structure fires and other emergencies that require a Chief Officer to implement the Incident Command System and manage said incidents. EIT's are an invaluable resource and comprise 50 percent of a Battalion Command team.

Shortly after the elimination of EIT's in 1998, LAFD Captain Joseph Dupee tragically died in a warehouse fire in south Los Angeles. I was one of the primary investigators from the LAFD that investigated Joe's death and witnessed his autopsy as part of the official investigation. In addition to the LAFD Serious Incident Investigation (SIRT), experts from the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOSH) conducted a separate and independent investigation into the circumstances and events of Joe's death.

One of the identified contributing factors in the events leading up to Joe's death was the elimination of EIT's which negatively affected the command, control, and communications at the fire that Joe suffocated and burned at. Shortly after the LAFD and NIOSH reports were published, funding for EIT's was returned and the EIT's were slowly added back over several budget cycles. It is indeed tragic and unfortunate that it took the death of an LAFD member to restore valuable LAFD personnel.

I was one of the investigators that reviewed the report with Joe's wife, Mrs. Julie Dupee, and had to explain to her how budget cuts to the fire department and the removal of EIT's had played a role in the death of her husband Joe. That is something that I will never forget.

Here we are in 2025, and the CAO and CLA have recommended that EIT's once again should be cut. I am writing to you to respectfully request that this proposed budget cut to the LAFD not be instituted and that savings from other areas of the LAFD budget be utilized if cuts to the fire department are deemed to be absolutely necessary.

Interim Chief Ronnie Villanueva testified before the Budget and Finance Committee last week and stated the following:

**"Losing EIT's would put lives at risk, this is going to come back and bite us".**

In 1998, Councilwoman Laura Chick stated *"I very much think the death of Captain Dupee brought a certain level of expediency to this debate. We had a real example of the ultimate risk"*. She went on to state ***"The Council will never make public safety cuts again-particularly to the Fire Department-without being much more deliberative and thoughtful to the effects the cuts will cause"*** (LA Times article).

As a resident of Los Angeles, and a retired 40-year LAFD member who has held the ranks of EIT and Battalion Chief, I am respectfully requesting that you heed the words of former Councilwoman Chick and be deliberative and thoughtful to the effects that the proposed cuts to the LAFD budget (removal of EIT's) will cause. I am more than willing to discuss any aspect of this issue anytime with anyone. I can be reached via email at: [mcas@att.net](mailto:mcas@att.net).

Mayor Bass, I was the on-duty Battalion Chief in command of Battalion 1 (downtown area) when you rode out with us at Fire Station 9 last year and responded to calls with the Fast Response Vehicle. You graciously spent over 5-hours with us and engaged in what I thought was very productive dialogue in Fire Station 9's (Skid Row) kitchen with myself, my EIT and 14 other fire personnel. We discussed at length, the ever-increasing call load and needs of the LAFD. You seemed sincere in your vocal support of your LAFD. Please do not fail us now in this most crucial issue that directly affects firefighter safety.

You may or not remember LAFD Captain Joe Dupee, who valiantly gave his life to the protection of life and property for the citizens of Los Angeles; therefore, the attached pages describe a little, who Joe was.

Sincerely yours,

*Mike Castillo*

Mike Castillo

## **Recalling a Hero Who Gave His Life for L.A.**

By Jon McDuffie

We provide a faceless, nameless service to a community that rarely knows how much they need us. We are a group of thousands, each with our own personality, family, and troubles. A band of anonymous “heroes” who subordinates ego and self-interest to serve a populace who only knows that we will be there when they call. We get paid for what we are able to do and the occasions when we are called to do it.

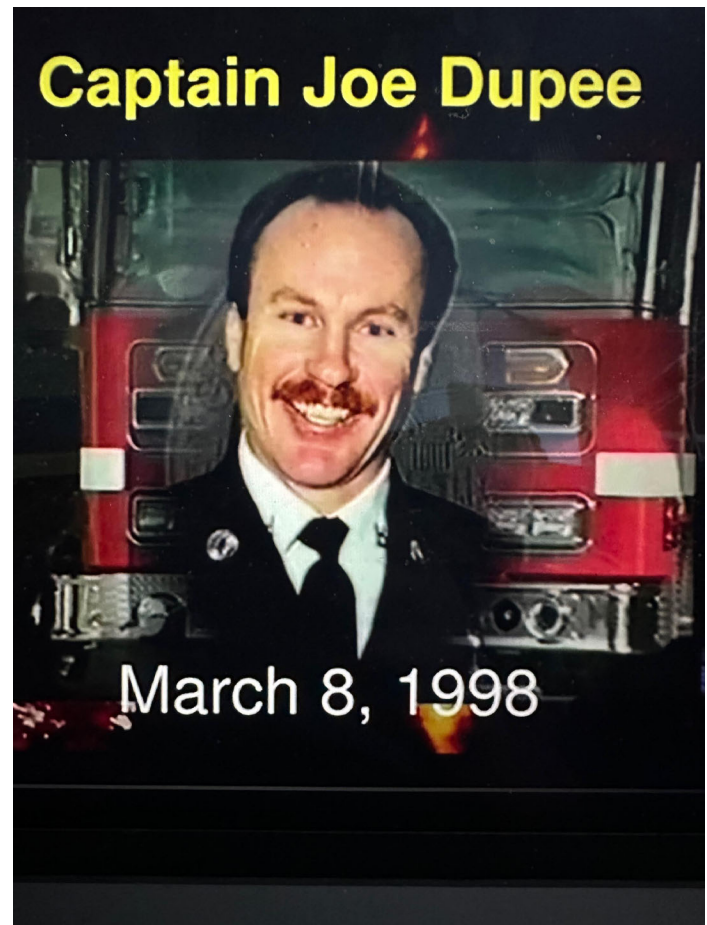
This week, one of us got a name, a face, a rank, a family...a life beyond the badge. His life now recognized, but only because it was sacrificed. He gave his life defending the property of a person he did not know, in a city that did not know him. His name was Joseph Dupee. I knew him before you, and I will remember him long after his name wanes in your short-term memory.

Ten mornings a month, Joe rose before the sun, kissed his sleeping family goodbye, and made the drive to his second home. He exercised; he trained himself and his crew. He laughed; he sulked; he handled tedious projects; he read his bible and spoke about it with others. He shared his opinions at the kitchen table. His brothers and sisters drank thousands of cups of coffee with him, all the while attempting to solve the problems of the world.

And then he would wait. And sometimes they worked harder than you could imagine.

Some of his workdays were spent waiting. Some days his city did not need him as much as other days, but he still waited. If you need Joe for small things—a broken water pipe, a child locked in a car, a pot of beans that cooked just a bit too long—he responded to your call.

Other times you needed him for life threatening emergencies—to rescue you from natural and man-made disasters, from fire, from accidents, from illness, from yourselves—he responded to your call.



You never doubted that Joe would be there for you. You never knew his name and he never asked you to justify your need. He served you because he wanted to help and he loved to help and he loved to help you. You could have stopped giving him pay raises, repairing his station, hiring more firefighters, and he would still be waiting to answer your call.

Joe loved his family, his God, and his country. He was an opinionated prankster who loved to talk, could not cook, and drove too fast behind the wheel of a fire engine. He was a good fire ground officer who worked aggressively at incidents and diligently at his post. He was on my platoon for three years; he will be my brother always. But you did not know him then. You only know him now.

Choose to think of him as a hero in death, and I tell you that he was a hero in life. Use Joe's memory for sadness and I will use it to comfort his family and my brothers and sisters that must continue to wait. Continue pouring out sympathy until it becomes a faint trickle, and I will still be waiting for the next call.

I provide a faceless, nameless service to a community that rarely knows how much they need me. If I am called from a sound sleep to sacrifice my life attempting to save the life or property of someone I do not know, I will do it without regret.

Joe did it. Why wouldn't I?

*Written by Jon McDuffie ( Los Angeles firefighter)*