

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

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September 2, 2022

Sent via email

Honorable Wendy G. Getty
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Solano
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(707) 435-2575 | CDClower@Solano.Courts.Ca.Gov

**Re: County Administrator's Office Response to Grand Jury Report – Effective
Emergency Response Needs City and County Support**

Honorable Judge Getty:

The County Administrator's Office appreciates the attention the Grand Jury has placed on the importance of emergency response in Solano County. The report highlights the need for better communication in the event of an emergency, especially with regard to establishing incident command. The County's responses to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations below reflect the County's ongoing commitment and efforts to address countywide emergency response. Current efforts include reorganizing fire districts, discussion on a possible joint powers authority ("JPA"), and identifying potential revenue sources for fire related efforts.

Under Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the County Administrator's Office is responding to the following recommendations and findings contained in the 2021-2022 Grand Jury Report titled, "Effective Emergency Response Needs City and County Support".

Findings and Recommendations

Finding #1 – The most dangerous failure during the LNU fire was the failure of the first Chief on the scene to establish an Incident Command Post.

Response to Finding 1: The County Administrator's Office partially disagrees with this finding. The County activated its EOC in response to the LNU fire through its Office of Emergency Services (OES), located within the Office of the Sheriff. This centralized office provides emergency management services to all incidents active within its operational area. Failure to quickly establish an Incident Command Post delays the ability of the County to deploy resources in support of first responders in the field. The County was contacted by CAL FIRE when Incident Command was established but reports indicate that the Vacaville Fire Protection District (VFPD) was the first on the scene. The fast-acting nature of the fire prevented the VFPD chief from establishing a command post in the field in a timely manner. VFPD was addressing two fires simultaneously, both the Henderson and Markley fires, without CAL FIRE assets on the scene, due to the large number of fires occurring throughout the state.

Recommendation 1 – *Train all emergency response personnel on the protocol for establishing an Incident Command Post. The Incident Command Post must be established immediately when the danger is detected.*

Response to Recommendation 1: This recommendation has been implemented as it pertains to emergency response personnel within the County’s control. The County offers regional trainings to first responders countywide in order to ensure all are trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The office of Emergency Services coordinates the scheduling of trainings and encourages all agencies within Solano to participate. NIMS training courses, including ICS 100, 200, 300, and 400, teach protocol for establishing an Incident Command Post, teaching the basics and then build upon this training with each course. The County will continue to encourage all agencies within the county participate and keep their staff trained in the latest coursework.

Finding 2 – *The lack of a consolidated digital communication system in Solano County hampers effective firefighting efforts.*

Response to Finding 2: The County Administrator’s Office agrees with this finding. The County has been actively engaged in improving consolidated digital communications. Phase one included the County utilizing a \$4 million grant to upgrade the County’s radio core system. Phase two included bringing the cities of Fairfield and Vacaville onto this core. In addition, the Department of Information Technology, utilizing funds secured by State Senator Bill Dodd, purchased 130 portable and mobile radios enabling better communications during mutual aid events. The County continues to explore bringing Benicia and Vallejo onto this system (currently part of East Bay Regional Communications System Authority (EBRCSA)). Solano County recognizes the importance of consolidated digital communications and is working with a consultant to update a conceptual plan on building out a full countywide system, to better inform ongoing conversations with other agencies in the county.

Recommendation 2 – *The Board of Supervisors broaden efforts to fund and promote the establishment of a modern digital county-wide emergency communications system.*

Response to Recommendation 2 - This recommendation is in the process of being implemented with progress expected to occur within the next six months. The County continues to provide radio core infrastructure services to Rio Vista fire and law, Dixon fire and law, and to the Cordelia, Montezuma, Suisun, and Vacaville fire protection districts. The JPA effort is exploring what it will require to bring other agencies onto this system. The County has placed a revenue measure on the November 8, 2022 statewide general election ballot, and if the measure is approved by the voters, additional resources would be available to further fund the county-wide emergency communications system.

Finding 3 – *Although law enforcement and fire departments throughout the county have been working to establish a JPA to develop a consolidated communications system, there is little support from the county to finalize the efforts.*

Response to Finding 3 – The County Administrator’s Office disagrees with this finding. The current status is that the City of Benicia entered into a contract with Mirror Consulting Group, LLC, who was hired to draft documents related to establishing a JPA, with the County and cities waiting for this process to complete in order to continue discussions regarding formation of this potential JPA.

Recommendation 3 – *Expedite JPA agreement within the county and develop a plan to move forward.*

Response to Recommendation 3 – This recommendation is in the process of being implemented with progress expected to occur within the next six months. The County and cities are still in discussions regarding a JPA or similar structure to facilitate consolidated digital communications, countywide. The current effort to evaluate what is needed includes identifying a funding source, and to address this, as mentioned above, the County has placed a revenue measure on the November 8, 2022 statewide general election ballot, which if approved by the voters, would be a potential new funding source to further this effort.

Finding 4 – A county fire department is needed to serve the unincorporated areas of Solano County.

Response to Finding 4: The County Administrator's Office disagrees with this finding. The County is not the provider of fire services within Solano County.

Recommendation 4 – Solano County establish a county-wide fire department to serve the unincorporated areas of Solano County.

Response to Recommendation 4: This recommendation will not be implemented since it is not warranted nor reasonable. The County is not the provider of fire services within Solano County. CAL FIRE provides service to the State Responsibility Area, and 13 separate entities provide services within the Local Responsibility Area. The County does agree that reducing the number of agencies can provide benefit and has submitted an application to LAFCO to consider reorganization of fire districts to provide better efficiencies. The County reviewed previous Civil Grand Jury reports as well as the LAFCO procured Citygate report, all of which identified a need for additional funding to provide better services in the unincorporated county. The result of this analysis was to place a revenue measure on the November 8, 2022 ballot which aims to bring in an estimated \$9 million in new revenue to the County, which will contribute additional funding resources to improve wildfire prevention and response capabilities in unincorporated areas of the county.

Finding 5 – *Funding from Proposition 172 has not been equitably distributed within the public safety entities.*

Response to Finding 5 – The County Administrator's Office disagrees with this finding. Funding allocated from Proposition 172 is equitably distributed within public safety entities and has since inception of this revenue source. Counties received Prop 172 funding and allocate this among their responsibility areas, including the Sheriff's office, Probation, and the District Attorney's Office. Prop 172 is also not a static revenue source and is dependent on the County's proportionate share of the statewide ½ cent sales tax.

Recommendation 5 – Board of Supervisors and cities within the county reprioritize the distribution of funds garnered from Proposition 172 ensuring that it is distributed more equitably to include fire safety.

Response to Recommendation 5 – This recommendation will not be implemented by the County since it is not warranted nor reasonable. However, the Board of Supervisors is seeking a new revenue source for support of rural fire districts by placing a revenue measure on the November 8, 2022 statewide general election ballot. Voters will be asked to approve a 1/8 cent sales tax increase, countywide, to fund services such as fire. The share of Prop 172 funds that the County receives are intended to fund public safety services under the County's responsibility rather than broaden to other service areas. Prop 172 was a mitigation response to ensure

preservation of public safety services during the 1993-94 state budget agreement that resulted in property tax transfers to local school districts.

Finding 6 – Only two agencies involved in the LNU fire produced after-action reports.

Response to Finding 6: The County Administrator's Office disagrees with this finding. CAL FIRE produced an after-action report, with input from all agencies throughout Solano County. The position with regard to the LNU fire was that CAL FIRE was the lead agency and responsible for submission to the State. The City of Vacaville did file a report with CAL OES, however mutual aid agencies (fire departments and districts) are not required to file. Solano County OES did comply with a request from CAL OES and CAL FIRE to submit after action report inputs (responses to questions, damage assessments, additional data).

Recommendation 6 – Solano County and cities within the county require all responding emergency agencies using public funding to produce after-action reports.

Response to Recommendation 6: This recommendation has been implemented. In the future, all agencies required to submit reports will be coordinated by the lead agency.

Sincerely,



Bill Emlen,
County Administrator

Cc: Board of Supervisors
Office of the Sheriff
Office of the Sheriff/Office of Emergency Services