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August 21, 2012

FILED

SEP 04 2012

The Honorable Eric L. DuTemple
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
41 W. Yaney Street
Sonora, CA 95370

Superior Court of California
County of Tuolumne

By: *[Signature]* Clerk

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report – County's Use of Cal Fire

Dear Judge DuTemple:

The following is offered in response to the 2011-12 Grand Jury Report as it pertains to the County's Use of Cal Fire.

Grand Jury Findings

There were no specific findings offered by the Grand Jury with respect to this topic. Instead, observations were made in follow-up to prior Grand Jury Reports related to the Future of Fire Safety in Tuolumne County. These observations are found on pages 11-13 of the 2011-12 Grand Jury Report. The Grand Jury had hoped for greater progress on the recommendations made previously but did note that some progress had indeed been made. Despite documentation contained in the Fire & First Responder Study, the Grand Jury noted that the following questions were often raised by people they spoke with:

- Could the County establish and operate its own fire department for the same amount of money (or less) than it pays CAL FIRE?
- Would there be advantages to having complete local control of a fire department in lieu of contracting with CAL FIRE?
- Would a County fire department be able to attract and retain volunteers better than CAL FIRE does?

In regards to the last point, the Grand Jury mentioned hearing opinions that *"the volunteer firefighter system is inhibited by CAL FIRE more than it is enhanced by*

CAL FIRE". In regard to these claims, the Grand Jury also noted that it "... can offer no proof of their validity" and that "no CAL FIRE officials were interviewed".

Grand Jury Recommendations

The Jury recommends a full independent audit of the County's use of CAL FIRE. A professional consulting firm could be used for this, but perhaps a local volunteer commission could be created at a much lower cost. Such a commission would include retired or active members with expertise in fire protection, accounting, finance, management, and reorganization. Ideally, members would be independent from CAL FIRE and the Tuolumne County Administration. One or more members of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors should participate or oversee this endeavor. The Jury also recommends that future Grand Juries continue monitoring this issue.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. First, each of the issues raised above were addressed as part of the Fire & First Responder Study. Second, the Board and staff are already aware of the concerns that have been expressed regarding CAL FIRE's effectiveness in recruiting, training and retaining volunteers within the County. These concerns are being addressed in several ways: a) Revitalization of the County's Volunteer Program is part of the Board's adopted 5 Year Plan and 2012 Board Goals. A draft volunteer program is currently under review by the CAO's Office and CAL FIRE Unit Chief; b) a new CAL FIRE Training Officer has recently been hired. This position is specifically funded as part of the County's CAL FIRE contract. One of his primary jobs is to address these concerns and implement the new volunteer program; and c) the new CAL FIRE Unit Chief is personally committed to working to improve CAL FIRE's image and performance in the areas expressed. Lastly, the effectiveness of the above will be monitored over the next 1-2 years. If tangible progress has not been made, additional actions will be presented to the Board for its consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above findings and recommendations. Please feel free to contact the County Administrator Craig Pedro should you have any questions regarding same.

Yours truly,



RICHARD PLAND
Chairman

I hereby certify that according to the provisions of Government Code Section 25103, delivery of this document has been made.

ALICIA L. JAMAR
Clerk of the Board

