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September 14, 2021

Honorable Judge Donna Stashyn  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
County of Solano, CA  
600 Union Ave  
Fairfield CA 94533

**RE: Solano County Board of Supervisors' Response to Grand Jury Report – Wildfires on the Horizon, Solano Homes at Risk!**

Honorable Judge Stashyn:

The Solano County Board of Supervisors appreciates the attention the Grand Jury has placed on the danger of wildfires in Solano County and the challenges facing the four rural fire protection districts noted in the report. The four districts are independent entities from the County but are responsible for protecting portions of Solano County generally most vulnerable to wildfires within their respective district boundaries and beyond under mutual aid agreements. One district (Cordelia) has a directly elected governing board while the other three are governed by boards appointed by the Board of Supervisors. They are the first line of defense in the unincorporated county in preventing the spread of wildfires from rural wildlands into urban cities as recently occurred in several nearby Northern California counties. The LNU fire in Solano County from 2020 clearly indicated how quickly a rural fire can spread to the edge of cities and more populated rural communities.

The current drought conditions and the multiple extended dry periods experienced in Solano County in recent decades have accentuated the dangerous conditions that exist and the need to take immediate and long-term actions to reduce risks to people, property, and wildlife. The County's responses to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations reflect the County's continuing commitment to address the threat from wildfires and the actions being taken or which are under consideration. This includes working with the fire districts to explore opportunities for reorganization and coordination of resources and opportunities for increasing durable, ongoing revenue sources.

Under Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Solano County Board of Supervisors is responding to the following recommendations and findings contained in the 2020-2021 Grand Jury Report titled, "Wildfires on The Horizon Solano Homes At Risk!"

**Findings and Recommendations**

***Finding #1 – Solano County's Fire Protection Districts are critically understaffed, under equipped, and underfunded to protect rural areas and adjacent cities from this season's wildfires and future wildfires.***

**Response to Finding 1:** The Board of Supervisors partially agrees with this finding. The rural fire protection districts have been able to provide responsive, cost effective fire protection services to the unincorporated areas of the county for many years. However, various factors in recent years have stretched resources available to the districts including, but not limited to, a decreasing property tax base

within the boundaries of the respective districts, challenges in retaining adequately trained volunteer firefighters, and increased costs of full time staffing. These and other factors are cited in the 2020 Citygate report prepared for the Solano County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) and referenced in the Grand Jury report. The Citygate report notes that all districts analyzed had long term fiscal challenges with some having immediate fiscal issues due to declining revenues and inadequate reserves. In response to these circumstances and combined with increasing patterns of severe drought and rapid spread of fires from rural areas into urban communities, the Board of Supervisors and County staff have been actively exploring options for wildfire prevention and improving responsiveness to wildfire events in rural areas of the county. Further details on actions taken or being considered are further elaborated upon in the responses below.

**Recommendation 1** – *Solano County and the Solano County Local Agency Formation Commission support immediate funding for the four FPDs.*

**Response to Recommendation 1:** This recommendation has been implemented. The County is pursuing several options to address the current state of rural fire protection districts and overall coordination of rural fire protection needs.

They include:

*Reorganization of Districts:* The Board of Supervisors adopted a Resolution of Application to LAFCO for reorganization of the Cordelia and Vacaville FPD's and a portion of the Suisun FPD into a single district which corresponds to the most at-risk of wildfire portions of the County. The purpose of the reorganization is to include greater coordination of resources and a unified command structure with administrative cost savings. It is anticipated that the application for reorganization will be heard by LAFCO by early 2022.

*Purchase of Falls School site:* The County acquired this property, a portion of which houses Cordelia Fire District Station #29. The County then continued the lease with the District which was at risk of termination if the school site had been sold to another entity. The site is strategically located for protection of the Green Valley area and western foothills. There is sufficient space available on the site for expanded fire operations should resources become available and a long term plan for use of the property is developed.

*Active Pursuit of grants:* The County received a grant to prepare a Hazard Mitigation Plan which is nearly complete. The completed plan increases opportunities to pursue other grant opportunities for equipment, facilities, and short-term staffing. The County is in line currently for grants to facilitate establishment and coordination of fire safe councils to increase resident communications and planning for evacuations and evacuation routes and creation of defensible spaces. Current grant opportunities total over \$1,275,000, and the County is actively preparing to apply for additional grant opportunities as they become available.

*State Funding:* The County has received \$1.9 million in State funding that will be utilized for fire monitoring and emergency notification equipment such as sirens, monitoring cameras, more defensible cell tower spaces, and better cellular coverage to rural customers.

*Increased Weed Abatement Enforcement:* The County increased coordination with the districts on weed abatement efforts in response to this year's dry conditions

*Exploration of Revenue options:* The County is exploring and analyzing options for an ongoing revenue stream in conjunction with district consolidation efforts. An increase in ongoing revenue will be necessary for the districts or a consolidated district to increase full time staff and to expand volunteer training.

The County believes the multi-faceted effort noted above represents a comprehensive approach to addressing wildfire risks both in this critically dry season and going forward.

**Finding 2** – *While LAFCO is bringing expert advice to the table to determine the path forward to address the increasing danger from wildfires, the pace at which it is going is too slow to address immediate wildfire concerns.*

**Response to Finding 2** – The Board of Supervisors partially disagrees with this finding. While we agree that the LAFCO process for evaluating the rural fire protection districts has taken some time, the scope of their review is, by nature and under statute, deliberative and comprehensive with a focus on long term boundary and service issues. The County is aware that a LAFCO ad hoc committee has spent considerable time working with the districts to evaluate governance, staffing, facility/equipment and funding issues. The County defers to LAFCO for further respond to this finding.

**Recommendation 2** – *LAFCO and Solano County separate the more immediate concerns of wildfire exposure and address those with urgency.*

**Response to Recommendation 2** - As noted in the response to recommendation #1 above, as it pertains to the County, this recommendation has been implemented. The County has taken several actions and will continue to pursue numerous options including working with the districts on immediate issues of wildfire risk. Many of these efforts are not dependent on the LAFCO process.

**Finding 3** – *Transitional financing is needed to equip the FPDs with new equipment and resilient firefighting techniques to adapt to the environmental changes now presented by the combined challenges of extreme heat, drought, and gale force winds along with random power outages.*

**Response to Finding 3** - The County agrees with this finding. The fire districts would benefit from funding to improve equipment, facilities, and for training. The County is attempting to facilitate grant opportunities for the districts for short term upgrades and is also evaluating longer term revenue options that would fund improvements.

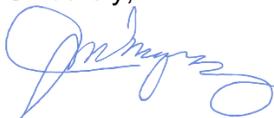
**Recommendation 3**– *Solano County immediately make resources available to the FPDs to deal with the new wildfire environment.*

**Response to Recommendation 3** - This recommendation has been partially implemented. As noted above, the County received a grant to complete the Hazard Mitigation Plan for the entire county which will facilitate pursuit of additional grant programs focused on modernized firefighting equipment and additional training for both paid and volunteer firefighters. A more consistent long-term funding source or sources is being explored in conjunction with the district consolidation effort.

On behalf of the Board of Supervisors, I would like to express appreciation to the Solano County Civil Grand Jury for conducting a review of wildfire risks and protection in Solano County, including the challenges faced by the rural fire protection districts to maintain adequate resources to keep up with this changing and challenging environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your findings and recommendations on this issue and all the work the Grand Jury conducts for the benefit of residents in Solano County.

Sincerely,



John M. Vasquez,  
District 4 Supervisor and Chair of the Board

Cc: Solano County LAFCO  
Board of Supervisors