

AMADOR FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

810 Court Street, Jackson California 95642-2132 (209) 223-6391



The Honorable Judge Renee C. Day, Presiding Judge -Amador County Superior Court
500 Argonaut Lane
Jackson, CA 95642

Katrina Zapata, Foreperson – Amador County Civil Grand Jury 2019-2020
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Walt White - Fire Chief
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Your Honor,

I truly appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury's report regarding Amador fire protection services. I commend the Jury on their unbiased reporting of the history and current status of fire protection in Amador County. Furthermore, I applaud their depth of assessment and their ability to discern opinion from fact and produce an accurate, fair and concise report.

In regards to the response map changes implemented by the Amador Fire Protection District (AFPD), in early June 2019, I believe that it is fair to note that these changes were well within the authority of AFPD given that these changes affected only areas within the AFPD Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) defined legal boundaries. The areas where AFPD is responsible and legally obligated to deliver services. Therefore, AFPD has the authority to determine how those services will be delivered as do other agencies within their LAFCO boundaries. Furthermore, it should also be noted that AFPD's response changes were consistent with industry best practices of dispatching the closest available resource to incidents regardless of agency or jurisdiction. Similar response changes have been made by other Fire Chiefs without discussion or consent of all Amador County Fire agencies, such as the Sutter Creek Fire Protection District's (SCFPD) decision to rent a home and relocate their fire station temporarily to the edge of AFPD, or the City of Jackson's decision to build a fire station on Argonaut Lane and move their operations from the center of their LAFCO boundaries to the edge of AFPD's. Furthermore, at a recent Amador County Fire Chiefs meeting on Thursday, November 5, 2020 in Plymouth, Fire Chief Debbie Mackey reported that the City of Jackson is seeking to secure property on New York Ranch Rd for a future fire station. Although the site would be within the city limits, it does seem to be a curious move to place a station on the edge of their LAFCO boundary, further encroaching on AFPD's legal boundaries and coverage responsibilities.

Under normal circumstances, I would welcome the added speed and weight of support to our District. However, the basis of these decisions seems to be an attempt to claim response areas and seek funding from AFPD. Yet both the City of Jackson and the Sutter Creek Fire Protection District have publicly opposed AFPD from placing or moving a fire station to the Martell area of AFPD, adding both speed and weight of support to their coverage responsibilities. AFPD is the only fire agency in the County that does not receive Measure M credit for all emergency responses within their LAFCO boundaries. All other fire agencies with the exception of Cal Fire and the Jackson Valley Fire Protection District have sought additional Measure M funding by claiming additional response areas in AFPD. Essentially, unofficially annexing portions of AFPD for funding purposes. Meanwhile AFPD has dealt with employee retention issues associated with compensation, while other County fire agencies are providing Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) benefits to their employees. Something AFPD cannot afford.

AFPD has a career workforce that is ten (10) times larger than any other Amador Fire Agency with the exception of Cal Fire and a LAFCO coverage area that is one-hundred (100) times larger than the cities of Jackson and Ione and the LAFCO boundaries of the SCFPD. However, Measure M funding distributions are made based on the population of your response area and the annual call volume within your agencies response area. This distribution method has resulted in inequitable agency funding and a manipulation of the calculating factors to which funding is awarded. Instead of creating a collaborative or consolidative environment, it has developed into a competitive one that has resulted in some of the unprofessional behavior by fire chiefs that has been detailed in this report. In my personal and professional opinion the focus of some area Fire Chiefs and their governing bodies has been more about maintaining titles and fiefdoms rather than on reducing redundancies and delivering efficient fire protection services to the communities of Amador County. This seems evident in their reluctance to jointly fund a Countywide Standards of Cover (SOC) study to identify best practices in strategic deployment.

I am hopeful that the Grand Jury's work to expose these issues will result in consolidative efforts and the creation of a reorganized, more efficient and effective fire protection delivery system for Amador County. I genuinely appreciate the time and attention that the Grand Jury spent to investigate this matter, I agree with their findings, I take their criticism and recommendations seriously and I look forward to opportunities to advance fire protection in the County and better serve our many communities.

Respectfully,



Walter White, Fire Chief
Amador Fire Protection District