

To: John McCowen, Chair, Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

From: Mendocino County Association of Fire Districts

The Mendocino County Association of Fire Districts was formed in 2015 to promote and sustain the effectiveness of local county fire agencies and their critical fire, rescue and medical aid operations and to actively pursue all issues that affect the operational health of our local fire departments. It is also the stated intention of the Association to bring these issues to the attention of the public we serve and the elected officials who are in a position to make funding decisions related to these issues. Specifically, it is the objective of this Association to secure and maintain equity in the distribution of Proposition 172 Public Safety sales tax and general fund revenues to county Fire and Emergency Medical Services.

This effort has taken a number of twists and turns, including public advocacy, numerous discussions by and among the Association members, a proposed ballot measure, a lawsuit and the appointment of an Ad Hoc committee of the Board of Supervisors. These efforts culminated in agreement by the Board of Supervisors to allocate \$398,000 in Fiscal Year 2016-17 to be distributed to local fire agencies based on a formula approved by the Association. Despite some delay, the funds were ultimately disbursed. At the same time, the Board of Supervisors agreed to work with the fire agencies to address long term strategic planning issues including identification of sustainable funding sources at the state or local level. To date, there has been little or no effort expended to achieve these longer term goals. We are recommending the re-establishment of the Board Ad Hoc Fire/EMS committee with a focus on 1) getting the 2018-19 allocation through the budget process with the allocation formula agreed upon by June and 2) making recommendations to the BOS regarding the long term financial and strategic needs of rural fire districts.

During budget deliberations for the 2017-18 fiscal year the Board of Supervisors again agreed to allocate \$398,000 but did not reach final agreement on the formula. Although the intention of the Association has been to support the fire agencies, there is some concern that the formula does not account for the population of the cities. An alternate formula has been proposed in an effort to resolve this difference with the hope that the fire agencies, the cities and the county can all reach agreement with the hope that all parties involved will be better able to focus our attention and our collective efforts on longer range objectives.

The 2016-17 formula allocates separate shares for both the Fort Bragg Rural Fire Protection District and the Fort Bragg City Fire department and for both the Ukiah Valley Fire Protection District and the Ukiah City Fire department. Although they are legally separate, the two fire entities in the Fort Bragg area, and those in the Ukiah Valley, function as a single unit operationally. Because there is no separate fire protection entity for the City of Point Arena or the City of Willits, the agencies that cover those areas (Redwood Coast Fire Protection District and Little Lake Fire Protection District) each receive one share. The current formula does not provide an allocation for the population of any of the four incorporated cities.

The alternative formula that is being proposed would eliminate the separate payments for the Fort Bragg and Ukiah City Fire Departments, with that amount redistributed to the other 20 fire districts. Finally, contingent on the Board of Supervisors agreeing to allocate additional funding, the alternative formula would make an allocation to each city based on population. In summary, the cities of Fort Bragg and Ukiah would not receive a separate allocation on a district basis, but along with the cities of Willits and Point Arena would benefit by receiving an allocation based on population. It must be emphasized that including the cities in the distribution based on population is contingent upon the Board of Supervisors increasing the total allocation. Under the proposed alternative formula, while the cities would benefit more overall by accounting for their population, a more equitable allocation for each district will be achieved.

We recognize that considerable effort was expended in reaching agreement on the original funding formula. We also recognize that no formula is perfect or accounts equitably for every nuance of the myriad differing circumstances of the individual fire agencies. The primary benefit of the proposed alternative, if it is

approved, is to shift the focus from the funding formula to the long term needs of the agencies. Further, during budget deliberations, the Board of Supervisors did agree to uncouple fire funding from the dispatch contract which means, for example, that increased county general fund expenditures for dispatch will not result in a reduction in funding for fire. While the new formula is also not attached to any ERAF calculations, moving forward, it does represent a quantifiable proportion of the total Prop 172 funds received by the County.

If the proposed alternative formula and increased funding is not approved, the most likely result is that each agency will receive the same amount of money in Fiscal Year 2017-18 as in the previous year. We are cautiously optimistic that approval of the alternative formula will create a more unified front and enable us to move forward and address more critical long term strategic planning issues, including opportunities to secure enhanced and sustainable funding to support our vulnerable fire, rescue and medical aid operations.

Submitted December 14, 2017 by the MCAFD steering committee based on direction from the meeting held December 13, 2017.