

# GEORGETOWN FIRE DISTRICT



Office Phone: 530-333-4111

Facsimile: 530-333-4020

[www.georgetownfiredepartment.com](http://www.georgetownfiredepartment.com)

Post Office Box 420

6283 Main Street

Georgetown, California 95634-0420

## The Georgetown Fire Protection District's Response to El Dorado County Grand Jury West Slope Fire Protection Update, Case 19-06 – June 8, 2020

The following is the official response of the Georgetown Fire Protection District (GFD) Board of Directors, as voted and approved on August 13, 2020.

The Georgetown Fire Protection District supports the Grand Jury process but believes truthful/factual information must be utilized in the process, or the entire process and associated report, is meaningless. In this regard GFD requests that the Grand Jury thoroughly review the population statistics provided in the report and issue a corrected version ASAP in order to ensure that the truth is told and that non-factual data is not promulgated throughout the El Dorado County community. The incorrect population figures are causing a dramatically incorrect (\$) Per Person chart. It will not be enough to include GFD's response to the report, the report needs to be corrected before being distributed.

Utilizing the following formula and figures supplied by El Dorado County, Georgetown Fire was able to provide much more accurate population figures for the Georgetown (GFD), Garden Valley (GVFD) and Mosquito (MFD) Fire Districts. We can only assume that the figures we calculated, based on the formula below, are much more accurate for those three districts but really a more accurate formula should be used to calculate all nine districts:

Registered Voters – El Dorado County states 63.9% of adults are registered

Children – El Dorado County states that children less than 18 years old comprise 19.27% of population

	<u>Registered Voters</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>(\$)</u> per person
GFD	2122	3321	793	4114	\$187.76
GVFD	3175	4969	633	6155	\$109.30
MFD	826	1293	309	1602	\$222.60

**"Neighbors helping Neighbors - Since 1854"**

The balance of our response to the findings and recommendations is listed below.

**Response to Findings** – Respondents must specify one of three options:

1. Respondent agrees with finding,
2. Respondent disagrees wholly with finding or
3. Respondent disagrees partially with finding

F1. Long term fiscal sustainability for fire protection on the West Slope of the County is highly questionable.

GFD agrees with finding, however, we question “how” we find ourselves in this position. The Grand Jury report insinuates that this situation has occurred due to some kind of financial mismanagement or poor decision making on the part of the fire departments involved. While ignoring one of the major reasons for this situation, decisions by the State of California and El Dorado County that have reduced, redirected and simply stone-walled funding for fire districts including ERAF, PILT, Aid to Fire, and Proposition 172 funds. In fact, GFD was even denied funds from an agreement between El Dorado County, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

In addition, the El Dorado County Emergency Medical Service Authority (EMSA) Service Area 7 (CSA-7) contracts with the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) and individual fire districts to provide ambulance services. However, those individual contracts do not include any funding for the County to pay for contingent liabilities for any previously funded JPA employees and any current JPA funded employees. This has unfairly shifted that burden for these liabilities directly to the fire districts. When CSA-7 was established in 1976 until the formation of the JPA in 1997, the County of El Dorado acknowledged that all employees that worked on CSA-7 ambulances were in fact County responsibility employees; even though the county funded them through the Fire Districts. Once the JPA was formed the County was able to transfer all contingent liabilities from the County, onto the individual Fire Districts. In 1997 an agreement was signed by all parties in which the county accepted the responsibility for the retirees prior to 1997. Those funds paid from the County to fire districts were halted after fiscal 2013/14. No funding has been provided for JPA funded employees who retire after 1997.

F2. County Citizens on the West Slope experience a wide disparity in fire protection services often masked by Automatic Aid, based on their location and their specific fire district.

1. GFD disagrees wholly with finding. The Georgetown Fire Protection District objects to the term "masked by Automatic Aid." El Dorado County's Automatic Aid system is incredibly beneficial to all the citizens of the County during times when a true emergency could and would drain all the resources of a local fire department. There is little doubt that the system has saved countless lives and should be lauded by any report on the fire services of the West Slope. Without such a system, more resources would be required to be in place in each individual fire department and the associated cost would be a huge burden on the County's taxpayers. Repeatedly in this report the Grand Jury states that the best way to move forward is to work together to “holistically” provide fire service to the communities and then criticizes us for the main way we are in fact currently working together “holistically”: Automatic Aid.

F3. Efforts to improve fire protection on the West Slope of the County have been ongoing for many years with limited success.

1. GFD agrees with finding. However, the GFD is concerned that the Grand Jury did not take into account the reduction in fire district revenues while trying to maintain, much less improve, fire services.

Cancellation of the Aid to Fire program – this was a program from El Dorado County Government to assist Fire Districts with additional revenues. This program was initiated in August of 2001 to assist funding of fire districts throughout the County but was cancelled in 2009 with no replacement mechanism for those funds.

ERAF (Education Revenue Augmentation Fund) funds were shifted away from fire districts to school districts. As an example in 2018/19 the El Dorado County Fire Protection District paid \$1,038,347, yet received nothing from Proposition 172 monies designed to offset this shift.

PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) – the Federal Government supplies funding to the County for emergency services to cover federal lands. Fire Districts get zero, yet are tasked with providing the emergency services.

Proposition 172 (Local Public Safety Protection and Improvement Act of 1993) sales tax funds – fire districts receive zero funds. These funds have brought in between \$5 million and \$12 million annually with **NONE** going to fire districts.

El Dorado County, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) reached an agreement in 2005 to provide funding, some of which should have come to fire districts for services to specific areas. However, fire districts, after initially being allowed in the negotiations, were excluded from the agreement and have received no revenues.

F4. Cal Fire has the infrastructure, staffing and expertise to be a major component of a solution to the County's fire district disparities.

1. GFD agrees with finding. In fact, GFD believes that Cal Fire is a huge part of the current abilities of fire districts to provide services to El Dorado County now and always should be in the future.

F5. Improvements in the existing fire protection model for the West Slope requires all fire protection districts to take a holistic view of fire protection and the political will to embrace change.

2. GFD partially disagrees with finding. GFD believes that working together with our neighbors in El Dorado County is morally, ethically, and most important, incredibly beneficial to all of the fire departments and their citizens. However, GFD believes strongly the GFD Fire Board, as set forth on Fire Protection District Law of 1987, has as its major responsibility "local provision of fire protection services, rescue services, emergency medical services, hazardous material emergency response services, ambulance services, and other services relating to the protection of lives and property."

F6. Fire protection districts on the West Slope have not displayed the ability to take a holistic view of fire protection or the political will to embrace, to the detriment (sic) of all County citizens.

2. GFD partially disagrees with finding. The Georgetown Fire District has been and is willing to have conversations and participate in studies on how we can improve the overall fire protection services throughout El Dorado County. However, as duly elected representatives to the Georgetown Fire Protection District Governing Board of Directors, to suggest that we make decisions from a holistic view is tantamount to malfeasance of office. Our job, as set out in the Fire Protection District Law of 1987, is listed below in section 13801:

13801. The Legislature finds and declares that the local provision of fire protection services, rescue services, emergency medical services, hazardous material emergency response services, ambulance services, and other services relating to the protection of lives and property is critical to the public peace, health, and safety of the state. Among the ways that local communities have provided for those services has been the creation of fire protection districts. **Local control over the types, levels, and availability of these services is a long-standing tradition in California which the Legislature intends to retain. Recognizing that the state's communities have diverse needs and resources, it is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this part to provide a broad statutory authority for local officials. The Legislature encourages local communities and their officials to adapt the powers and procedures in this part to meet their own circumstances and responsibilities.**


However, the Georgetown Fire Protection District does recognize that the County of El Dorado and the State of California absolutely has the authority and responsibility of taking a holistic view of providing fire and emergency services to the citizens of El Dorado County and the State of California. With that responsibility also comes the responsibility for proper financing of the fire districts and fire departments that provide those services. To continually reduce/remove funding or simply refuse to give funding that was previously given or at the very least was earmarked for the emergency services that the Fire Departments in El Dorado County provide, could be seen as malfeasance of office.

### **Response to Recommendations**


R.1 1. GFD agrees with finding. GFD further believes that the only way to move forward with the overall concept of improving County fire protection services is to involve El Dorado County and the State of California to determine ways to improve the holistic funding mechanisms for the provision of those services.

The Georgetown Fire District stands by our belief that the Georgetown Fire Protection District is doing a commendable job providing a full range of services to the citizens of Georgetown and additionally in support of all the citizens of El Dorado County and its visitors.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
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Larry Anderson, President

  
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Bob Brown, Director

  
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Craig Davis, Director

  
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Rick Todd, Director

  
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Rod Williams, Director

  
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Glenn W. Brown, Fire Chief