



**PIONEER FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**  
**FIRE • RESCUE • EMS**



P.O. Box 128  
7061 Mt. Aukum Road  
Somerset, California 95684  
Phone (530) 620-4444 • Fax (530) 620-4317  
[www.pioneerfire.org](http://www.pioneerfire.org)

July 7, 2020

Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury  
Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court  
1354 Johnson Blvd, Suite 2  
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Honorable Kingsbury,

The Pioneer Fire Protection District has reviewed the 2019-20 West Slope Fire Protection Update Grand Jury report (Case 19-06 June 8, 2020) although, there are areas of understanding and agreement we admittedly oppose releasing this report to the public. The following is the Pioneer Fire Protection District Board of Directors and Fire Chiefs response to the findings of the Grand Jury Report (West Slope Fire Protections Update).

The reports contains inconsistencies and flawed information, it is filled with conjecture, non subject or industrial expertise opinions (appearing bias). In additions, a public investigative report should have 100% accurate information from each and every aspect, this report fails to accomplish those standards. The public review (Grand Jury report) is that it has been thoroughly investigated and should not contain bias, conjecture, opinions, inconsistency and inaccurate information. In addition, they will assume subject matter expertise have been a major component of the investigation. This report has failed to meet those expectations and standards.

Listed are the sections containing inconsistent, bias, conjecture, flawed information and non industrial subject or matter expertise.

Page 2 Discussion Paragraph 2

**Respondent disagrees partially with finding/Respondent disagrees wholly with finding**

Individual West Slope fire protection districts vary greatly in population and density of flammable structures. Each district is varied in the services it provides and is unique in the level of staffing and hours of operation. District staffing includes full-time employee firefighters and volunteers. Volunteers are sometimes paid a small stipend when on duty, depending on the district. El Dorado Hills has three paid employees per engine and operates twenty-four hours per day, 7 days a week (24/7). El Dorado County, Diamond Springs and Rescue, all have two paid employees per engine and also operate 24/7. Cameron Park is operated under contract with Cal Fire and is also 24/7 with two paid employees per engine. The remaining, more rural districts, Georgetown, Garden Valley, Mosquito and Pioneer, have minimal employee staffing and rely on volunteers. These rural districts depend on volunteers in an attempt to stay staffed 24/7. However, there are times when there is nobody on duty. It is not considered safe to respond on a call with less than two firefighters. Nationwide standard practice is to have at least three firefighters on scene before entering a burning



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structure. Volunteers are required to have the same certification as an employee firefighter. The ability to recruit, train and retain volunteers remains a challenge for these districts

### **Respondent disagrees wholly with finding**

The highlighted areas in the above section are in accurate as listed below:

El Dorado County, Diamond Springs operate certain station with 3 or 4 personnel per Engine Company 24/7 Pioneer Fire Protection District operates with 2-person paid station 24/7; PFPD relies on volunteer to up staff stations and jointly staffs a station in Fiddletown on the weekends. Pioneer Fire Protection District has not had any occasion in 2019-20 where we had no one on duty. In addition, nationwide standard and NFPA is to have a minimum of 4 personnel on scene, know as 2 in and 2 out. Volunteers can be specifically trained to respond to either EMS only, Wildland only and Structure or any combination. This is not the norm for career firefighters.

Page 3 Discussion Paragraph 3

### **Respondent disagrees wholly with finding**

Should a fire district find that they are responding to an inordinate number of calls in another district that is unable to provide adequate service to its own district, the responding district may opt out of Automatic Aid with that district, leaving it under-protected. Citizens, especially those in rural and small districts, need to be more aware of their fire district's financial and operational condition before the district reaches a breaking point.

It not necessarily under-protected it may not be as efficient as it was with Auto Aid, responding districts do not opt out in Automatic Aid during or prior to a call there is a process if an agency wishing not to participate.

Page 3 Discussion Table

### **Respondent disagrees wholly with finding**

The table to the right illustrates money available for fire services by district and per citizen. Population numbers are best current estimates. Revenue amounts are taken from the districts published 2019-2020 budgets and includes property taxes, special assessments and basic service fees. The revenue does not include money from ambulance contracts or potential strike team revenue. This revenue amount must support cost of operations as well as reserves for equipment purchases, facility upgrades and emergencies.

The chart listed Pioneer population base as 7000 which is well over 7500. In addition, Pioneers budget is supported by revenues received from Strike Team deployment and contracture services. Of the \$1,111,357 Pioneer includes \$175,000 funds received through Strike Team deployment and other



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contractual services cost recovery programs. In addition, taxes are not paid by individuals it is paid by parcel (parcel tax). Charts should be fact not as listed speculation.

Page 4 Discussion Cal Fire

#### **Respondent disagrees wholly with finding**

Cal Fire protection in California is divided into three areas: Federal, State and Local Responsibility Areas all are for vegetation fire response only. Cal Fire provides full-service fire protection for State and Local Responsibility Areas in certain counties. Counties where Cal Fire provides most of the service include large counties like San Diego and Riverside, to small counties like Butte and Tehama. Cal Fire has the infrastructure, staffing and expertise to be a major component of a solution to the County's fire district disparities as it has in other California counties.

This paragraph is inaccurate and opinion only (it is not from any subject matter or industrial expertise or a non bias consultant), the All Hazards County that you have listed are not all done by Cal Fire, These counties have municipal fire departments that are not contracted with Cal Fire and there has been several concerns and issues over the years that have aroused with Cal Fire ability to manage such components or solutions and have increase the funding and fiscal responsibility greatly over there tenure. If you are going to express such a bias statement it should have comparisons and validity not opinion.

If you are looking for solutions, we would suggest you utilize subject matter expertise or industrial experts to formulate options and not speculate on one agency's ability. If the funding was available to our county fire agency's we could surpass and provide a more efficient service. In those counties listed the county's fiscally support the fire service Riverside County 3-year contract for service is 670 million dollars which increased from the previous contract of 25.5 million dollars and does not cover all the fire departments or district response areas (several cities are not included). If the county chose constituents chose to have a county fire you are required by statute to facilitate several options not express an opinion on one.

Page 5 Conclusion

#### **Respondent disagrees wholly with finding/Respondent disagrees partially with finding**

El Dorado County is suffering from the legacy of many fire districts, locally created at a time when there was no other option. Some of the districts go back more than 100 years. There is strong loyalty to a local home district at the expense of the County as a whole. The citizens of the more rural districts take pride in their independence and isolation from the masses. Living in remote areas comes with the understanding that fire protection service will be only as good as limited revenue can provide. Districts with higher revenue provide a higher level of service and enjoy large financial reserves that insure the level of service and contingencies. Some question the fairness of asking those districts to share their revenues with other districts. Yet, it should be obvious that the level of



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service now enjoyed in the more rural districts is indirectly subsidized by the wealthier districts through the tenuous Automatic Aid program.

This paragraph is not substantiated as it relates to Pioneer Fire Protection District. Pioneer Fire District is a combination all hazards (EMS, Rescue, Fire and more) district. It auto aids more than it receives, constantly utilized as a move up and cover station for surrounding district while vacating its own district. Pioneer covers its own district during this time, funds the move ups/covers and responses outside its boundaries while covering its own district with off duty personnel and volunteers.

The County Sheriff's Department is a single entity that provides service in every unincorporated part of the County, including remote rural areas along with dense suburban neighborhoods. The consistent high level of service and professionalism we see from the Sheriff's Department is in striking contrast to the many existing fire protection districts, and also a striking example of what a unified County fire protection agency could look like. The men and women firefighters in our County are true professionals that we are proud of. Given a unified County fire agency, the firefighters could receive the support, safety and consistency they deserve.

You failed to state that the Sheriff's (elected official agency) office receives about 51% of the county funds, and that the county does not fund or assist the west slop fire districts/departments with any known funding to date. However, this report has an opinion on how district elected officials should do business. In addition, passes ordinance post facto that requires the fire districts to utilize their funds to follow or enforce. You have failed to mention that the county CAO's office fails to distribute 172 funds that should have been distributed to local fire districts and department per state statute. In addition, you failed to mention that the CAO's office has failed to distribute PILT funding per the Federal (Department of Interior/US Department of Agriculture) guidelines (over \$750,000 miss-represented in 2019-20).

Page 6 Findings

**Respondent disagrees partially with finding/Respondent disagrees wholly with finding**

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

Yes, we agree that long term fiscal sustainability is in question. However, when local districts discuss or meet to collaborate on JPA's, Fire Authority or other types of collaborations other agencies fill the need to disrupt this process or demand to be included. In addition, you failed to mention our elected officials and professional working for them have been told by their constituents no more taxes. "The county takes enough, from us"; this alone has made it challenging for the fire districts.

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.



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Automatic Aid and Mutual Aid is collaboration and is a big part of working towards sustainability, especially when funding is not available. You failed to list real examples of disparity, looking to nearby county's (same demographics) for comparable services being provided. We are not questioning that we have to do more with less, we have been aware of this for a long time. Your trained, educated and professional County Fire Chiefs are way ahead of this report! However the Grand Jury report has not listed any persons or consultants with subject expertise in these areas and seems to be bias with a larger state agency.

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

You mention the disparity, but fail to come up with real equitable solutions and seem to listen to only one agency. In addition, Pioneer Fire Protection District has open two stations in 2019 and in 2020 open a combined collaborated station with Amador Fire Protection District are working towards opening another station, adding paid personnel and volunteers.

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

We disagree with this opinion and believe you should have utilized subject matter experts and not given an opinion (that appears bias). This district had a different experience with Cal Fire and it is not listed in your opinion.

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.

Is this an educated and historical analogy, or is this just an opinion? The local fire districts elected officials are part of this political arena and hear from its constituents often on this subject, we believe you to be cavalier and basically a back-seat driver with limited knowledge and access to our community. Reality, smaller communities do not embrace change especially in our demographics. It is more difficult than "holistic" we do not believe holistic it's practical in this category or your response, and under definition in our state it's were not positive holistic is a legal approach!

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 change, to the detriment of all County citizens.

Again, we do not support or agree with this statement. It should not have been added.

Page 6 Recommendations

### **Respondent disagrees partially with finding**



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R1. Fire Protection Districts, Cal Fire, BOS and LAFCO should continue discussing ways to improve County fire protection services.

**Concluding Summary:**

In 2019-20 Pioneer Fire Protection District began conversations with Amador County Fire Protection District regarding collaborating resources. In addition, we have entered with Amador County and 4 other agency regional Safer Grant to consolidate recruitment, training and retention of volunteers for each of the six (6) agencies. We are currently working with Garden Valley and Georgetown in separate regional grants. In 2019-20 Amador County Fire Protection District and Pioneer Fire Protection District amended and renewed its Auto Aid Agreement and recently entered into a JOA, and are collaborating on a shared station in Fiddletown. We truly respect what all of our County Fire Chiefs (Neighboring Fire Chiefs) are facing. We are moving forward, but it is very difficult to move forward when we have more than our community's opinions to deal with especially when a Grand Jury report comes out with inaccurate information and does not include professional subject matter or industry experts' opinions or practical non funded solutions!

There are a number of sweeping statements regarding the fitness, readiness and preparation of the Districts which are based and what appear to be skewed and bias perspective of pro Cal Fire as if it is a foregone conclusion that they should be the entity taking care of the fire/rescue/EMS protection of our county. The most egregious and blaring are the calculations of per person dollars which are inaccurate for a number of reasons not the least which is the incorrect population numbers. These are grossly inaccurate. Furthermore this "cherry picking" of data creates a narrowed scope that does not come close to painting a complete picture.

The report does not address the fact the Pioneer Fire Protection District has already entered into working relationships with Amador Fire Protection District and has opened additional fiscally responsible services to our community. Perhaps the Grand Jury should look to Pioneer and our creative work to enhance our service even as we see retraction in revenue.

Jerry Jumper

Marie Fitts

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FFPD BOD Chair

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FFPD BOD Vice Chair

Mark S. Matthews

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FFPD, Fire Chief