

LAFCO

Santa Barbara Local Agency Formation Commission

105 East Anapamu Street ♦ Santa Barbara CA 93101

805/568-3391 ♦ FAX 805/647-7647

www.sblafco.org ♦ lafco@sblafco.org

July 18, 2001

Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Santa Barbara
County Courthouse
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

**Response to Grand Jury Report Regarding Fire
Protection and Emergency Medical Services**

Dear Judge:

This response is provided pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05.

The 2000-2001 County Grand Jury report entitled "Regional Approach to Providing Better Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services to Santa Barbara County's Residents" is directed specifically to the Santa Barbara Local Agency Formation Commission (hereafter Commission).

On June 7 members of the Grand Jury provided the Commission with an overview of the report, at which time testimony was received from interested parties. On July 5 the Commission discussed this matter further and directed that this response to the report be provided.

The Grand Jury report makes 20 findings, appended as Exhibit A. The Commission agrees with Findings 1 through 15 and Finding 19, which are factual statements. Finding 1, for example, states "There are nine separate and independent fire departments in Santa Barbara County."

Findings 16 through 18 and Finding 20 are conclusions about which the Commission disagrees until such time as it can conduct a separate evaluation.

The Grand Jury report makes two interrelated recommendations:

Recommendation 1. That the Santa Barbara Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), pursuant to Government Code Sections 56001 and 56301, review this report and findings in order to make recommendations on consolidation or reorganization of

specific County services, including fire prevention and suppression services, evaluate the possibility of contracting with the California Department of Forestry (CDF) for all or part of these services, and centralized dispatch for fire and emergency medical response services in Santa Barbara County.

Recommendation 2. That LAFCO consider conducting its study into this matter utilizing a reorganization committee with participants from the affected parties and public agencies pursuant to Government Code Section 56833.

The recommendations will not be implemented and the Commission does not intend to implement these recommendations at this time because they are unreasonable for the following reasons:

- While it appears that creating a centralized fire and emergency services dispatch system holds the greatest immediate interest for emergency response agencies, this activity does not involve the Commission. This is not a change of organization as the term is defined in LAFCO's enabling statute, the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act (Government Code Section 56000 et seq.)

The Commission is unable to implement this recommendation. Functional consolidations can be achieved through the cooperative efforts of the affected agencies, including the County, without exercise of the Commission's regulatory authority.

- Affected fire protection and emergency service agencies have not indicated an interest in the Commission proceeding to study governmental or structural reorganizations. Cooperation of these agencies is essential to a successful evaluation.

Perhaps creating a centralized dispatch system for fire and emergency medical services may serve as a catalyst for future structural reorganizations.

- The ability of the Commission to implement the recommendation at this time is limited since it has experienced greatly expanded responsibilities due to enactment of Assembly Bill 2838 (the Hertzberg Bill) which became effective January 1, 2001 and mandates among other things the periodic review of spheres of influence in conjunction with the preparation of

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municipal service reviews. The Commission's limited resources must at this time be directed toward these statutory responsibilities.

The Commission's determination not to implement the Grand Jury's recommendations at this time should not be interpreted as disrespect towards the analysis prepared by members of the Grand Jury or lack of interest with regard to potential benefits that could accrue to the public from beneficial reorganizations of fire protection and emergency medical services.

The Court is encouraged to contact the undersigned if there are any questions.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

TIM CAMPBELL
Chair

cc: Each member of the Commission
Fire Protection and Emergency Service Agencies