



A Tradition of Stewardship  
A Commitment to Service

**Board of Supervisors**

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**Belia Ramos**  
Chair

July 25, 2023

The Honorable Cynthia Smith, Presiding Judge  
Superior Court of Napa County  
825 Brown Street  
Napa, CA 94559

Dear Judge Smith:

As required by Penal Code Section 933(C), enclosed is the response to the Grand Jury's report, "Napa County Volunteer Firefighters Lack of Volunteers and their Utilization are Burning Issues."

The Board acknowledges the members of the 2022-2023 Grand Jury for the time they have devoted to the reports.

Sincerely,

Belia Ramos  
Chair, Napa County Board of Supervisors

cc: Foreperson, 2022-2023 Grand Jury  
1754 Second Street, Suite D  
Napa, CA 94559

**Brad Wagenknecht**  
District 1

**Ryan Gregory**  
District 2

**Diane Dillon**  
District 3

**Alfredo Pedroza**  
District 4

**Belia Ramos**  
District 5

NAPA COUNTY  
RESPONSE TO THE GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT ON  
NAPA COUNTY VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS LACK OF VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR UTILIZATION ARE BURNING  
ISSUES

APRIL 26, 2023

**Findings**

**Finding 1:** The current structure of the volunteer monthly stipend does not reward the volunteers who respond to multiple calls.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 2:** The operational model for how volunteers are used in support of the Napa County Fire Department is ineffective because it does not hold volunteers accountable for not responding to emergency calls.

The Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief agree with this finding.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 3:** The low response rate from the Soda Canyon Volunteer Fire Station compromises its effectiveness to provide reliable fire protective service.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 4:** Napa County does not have a dedicated web page or program for the purpose of recruiting new volunteers from a broader group of potential applicants.

The Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief agree with this finding.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 5:** The Board of Supervisors representative for the Fire Service Advisory Committee has not changed in four years, creating a lack of representation from all five Supervisory Districts.

The Napa County Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding that the FSAC representative has not changed in four years; however, the Board disagrees with the statement that all supervisory districts' perspectives are not heard within the committee.

**Finding 6:** The selection process and criteria for the position of Volunteer Fire Chief is not standardized under state-mandated industrial guidelines.

The Napa County Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief agree with this finding.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

**Finding 7:** The volunteers do not have a liaison officer to act as a spokesperson between them and the Napa County Fire Department, resulting in miscommunication and misunderstandings between both groups.

The Napa County Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding that there is not a liaison. However, the Fire Services Advisory Committee provides a more direct and effective method of communication between the volunteer firefighters and the Napa County Fire Department.

**Finding 8:** The volunteer firefighters have morale problems resulting from a perceived lack of appreciation by the Board of Supervisors and the Napa County Fire Department.

The Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief agrees with this finding that there are morale problems resulting from perceived lack of appreciation. Although both the Board of Supervisors and the Napa County Fire Department regularly demonstrate that they highly value the volunteer firefighters, staff will continue to explore other avenues to improve morale such as public recognition. Staff believes that issues related to morale reflect the ineffectiveness of the current volunteer firefighter model, which will be addressed once the model has been updated.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** By December 1, 2023, the Board of Supervisors develop a plan that calls for the volunteer's monthly stipend to be replaced with a Paid Per Call system.

*Board of Supervisors Response:* The recommendation has not yet been implemented. This recommendation is currently being reviewed by staff to implement a new pay-per-call system in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024. This new pay-per-call system will have potential fiscal and labor implications. The Napa County Human Resources Department is exploring the model which other counties have adopted and will return with the recommended best fit for Napa County Fire.

**Recommendation 2:** By December 1, 2023, the Board of Supervisors establish a committee of volunteer firefighters, paid staff from the Napa County Fire Department, and members of the community to develop a new operational model that places more emphasis in responding to larger fires in a surge capacity. The new model would classify the volunteers as reserve firefighters.

*Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief Response:* This recommendation requires further analysis. This analysis will need to determine the best model for the volunteers (such as reserve vs. paid call firefighters). Furthermore, the structure of the volunteer companies will have to be addressed to ensure that the function of the volunteer companies and equipment is used in an effective and coordinated matter. This process will take several months to complete. The Board of Supervisors is also examining this issue as part of the recently presented Long Range Master Plan.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* The Board of Supervisors agree with the Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief.

**Recommendation 3:** By December 1, 2023, the Board of Supervisors authorizes the Napa County Fire Department to relocate and consolidate the volunteers assigned to the Soda Canyon Volunteer Fire Station to the Napa County Fire Department's paid fire station #25 on Monticello Road. The relocation and consolidation include moving the remaining fire apparatus equipment from the Soda Canyon Volunteer Fire Station to the paid station #25.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* The recommendation has not yet been implemented. The move will require logistics and coordination with Napa County Fire and volunteers assigned to the Soda Canyon Volunteer Fire Station. This consolidation will use equipment and volunteer firefighter time better and serve the community better. Much of the equipment of the Soda Canyon Volunteer Fire Station is already located at Fire Station 25 on Monticello Road. Implementing this recommendation will ensure that volunteers will response from a station that is more centrally located, allowing for a more efficient and expedited response. This recommendation will be implemented by July 1, 2024.

**Recommendation 4:** By December 1, 2023, the Napa County Deputy Fire Chief, in conjunction with the Volunteer Fire Chiefs, establish a County-wide dedicated web page for the purpose of providing information to the public about the volunteer firefighter program in Napa County. The information must include a mission statement, the minimum requirements to become a volunteer firefighter, and the level of training necessary to meet state-mandated fire and safety regulations.

*Napa County Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief Response:* The recommendation has not yet been implemented. Napa County Fire, with the support of the Information Technology Services Department and the County Executive Officer will establish a web page that services this purpose by January 1, 2024. Staff will continue to explore other potential recruitment efforts such as advertising through social media, community events or expanding the Firefighter Explorer program.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* The Board of Supervisors agree with the Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief.

**Recommendation 5:** By September 30, 2023, the Board of Supervisors representative to the Fire Services Advisory Committee will be appointed on a yearly cycle with each supervisor serving on a rotating basis.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* This recommendation has not yet been implemented. The Board of Supervisors selects committee representatives each year in January based on interest and availability. This recommendation will be considered in January 2024, instead of September 2023.

**Recommendation 6:** By December 1, 2023, the Napa County Deputy Fire Chief adopt and enforce the selection criteria for the position of Volunteer Fire Chief that follows state-mandated guidelines.

*Napa County Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief Response:* This recommendation has not yet been implemented. Candidates for the Volunteer Fire Chief position must adhere to training requirements outlined in the 4001-training manual, which includes previous positions such as Firefighter, Fire Apparatus Operator, Company Officer, and Fire Captain. An application process followed by an interview will be conducted to select the right candidate.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* The Board of Supervisors agree with the Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief.

**Recommendation 7:** By December 1, 2023, the Board of Supervisors reinstate the volunteer liaison position with a retired firefighter.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* This recommendation has not yet been implemented. Napa County is hiring a Fire Administrator which will not be part of CalFire but will help support the volunteers. This Fire Administrator will be responsible for fire mitigation, contracts and supporting the volunteers. Additionally, the new CalFire Cooperative Agreement provides for county funded Battalion Chiefs which will be dedicated to the volunteers as part of their administrative oversight duties. The goals of this recommendation, to better support and coordinate with volunteers will be implemented by December 1, 2023, without the volunteer liaison position. These positions provide more staff than the volunteer liaison and will be able to provide better support to the volunteers.

**Recommendation 8:** By December 1, 2023, the Board of Supervisors and the Napa County Deputy Fire Chief coordinate with the local media to publish a feature article for the general public highlighting the successes of the volunteer program.

*Napa County Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief Response:* This recommendation has not yet been implemented. The Napa County Fire Department with the support of the County Executive Office will work with local media to feature the value of the volunteer firefighter program by December 1, 2023.

*Board of Supervisor Response:* The Board of Supervisors agree with the Napa County Fire Unit Chief and Deputy Fire Chief.