



San Joaquin County Regional Fire Dispatch Authority

SJCRFDA Fire 9-1-1 Center ■ 425 N El Dorado Street ■ Stockton, CA 95202

September 13, 2017

Honorable José L. Alva, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
180 West Weber Avenue, Suite 1306
Stockton, CA 95202

Re: San Joaquin County Regional Fire Dispatch Authority Response to
Grand Jury Report: Countywide Dispatch for Fire

Honorable José L. Alva, Presiding Judge:

The San Joaquin County Regional Fire Dispatch Authority (“SJCRFDA” or “Authority”) has reviewed the San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury Report titled “Countywide Dispatch for Fire *Two Are Not Always Better than One* 2016-2017 Case No. 0616” (“Report”). The SJCRFDA was not identified as an agency required to provide a response to the Report. However, since the SJCRFDA is a primary subject of the Report, the SJCRFDA Board of Directors felt it appropriate to respond by way of this letter. SJCRFDA is also taking this opportunity to clarify statements made in the Report.

COMMENTS ON BACKGROUND

While there are differences in the governance of the two fire dispatch centers in San Joaquin County, private for profit vs. a public agency, the report does not accurately characterize the provision of dispatch services by the SJCRFDA. The technology utilized by the SJCRFDA dispatch center is in the process of being updated. The Report characterizes this infrastructure as nearing “End-of-Life” without properly characterizing the relatively short life span of all technology used in dispatch operations and fails to identify that this situation is not unique to SJCRFDA.

COMMENTS ON DISCUSSION

The “Discussions, Findings and Recommendations” section of the Report states that the vast majority of fire agencies are in favor of a single county wide emergency fire dispatch center. The SJCRFDA was formed to be the premier, county wide emergency dispatch agency, which is evidenced by its membership – the Cities of Lodi, Tracy, Manteca and Stockton and the Lathrop-Manteca Fire District. The SJCRFDA members are the largest fire departments within the County with a large call volume, approximately 84,000 calls per year.



The Report discusses the Sonoma County REDCOM dispatch Center as an example of a model county wide dispatch center. REDCOM is operated by AMR, as is VRECC. Historically, call processing and performance has been substandard. The latest data indicates that it takes VRECC, on average, 3:18 minutes to process a medical call and the national standard is 1:30 seconds (NFPA 1221). Unfortunately, the accreditation that VRECC recently completed, and the Report references, does not require dispatch centers to meet the national standards for call processing times. The Operation Agreement between the SJCRFDA and the City of Stockton requires Stockton dispatch to meet the national standards for call processing times or face fines, penalties, assessments or termination of the agreement.

The reference to REDCOM as a model center seems misplaced as there are high performing regional dispatch centers within San Joaquin County, namely the SJCRFDA, and counties contiguous to San Joaquin County. Sacramento County, Stanislaus County, Alameda County and Contra Costa County all have high performing regional centers that could be used as a model for a regional center in San Joaquin County.

Additionally, the Report discusses the differences in cost per call between VRECC and JRUG. However, the report fails to identify additional charges imposed by VRECC making their cost per call significantly greater than those of the SJCRFDA.

Lastly, the Report identifies the difference in operation models and focuses on the fact that AMR is a “for-profit, non-governmental agency utilizing corporate employees.” What the Report fails to take into account is because VRECC is operated by a private company the employees can strike in the event of a labor dispute. State law prevents public agency emergency dispatchers from striking, meaning labor disputes will not disrupt the provision of emergency dispatch services provided by SJCRFDA. In addition, as a private corporation, AMR is not subject to the California Public Records Act and other open government laws allowing AMR to keep information and data pertaining to call processing times confidential, whereas such information pertaining to the SJCRFDA is available and accessible by the public.

FINDINGS

Finding F1.1: The City of Stockton is replacing its CAD technology which, once completed, will allow Stockton dispatch and Authority member agencies to more seamlessly communicate and dispatch calls. The technology updates in progress contemplate and include the integration of AVL which will allow dispatch to track and dispatch the closest emergency vehicles to the call location. While the Report states that this technology solution “will be end of life in less than four years from the date of implementation”, that is the standard life span for this technology and is not unique to Stockton dispatch but is true for all agencies utilizing CAD technology.

Finding F1.2: The SJCRFDA is in favor of a single countywide emergency dispatch center as that was one of the primary reasons for its creation. The largest fire departments within



the County comprise the SJCRFDA and joined the JPA with the goal of becoming the countywide dispatch agency.

Finding F1.3: The Authority was created with the goal of becoming the regional dispatch center that dispatches for all fire agencies and ambulance companies within San Joaquin County. The Authority member agencies (City of Lodi, City of Manteca, Lathrop-Manteca Fire District, City of Stockton and City of Tracy) have been advocates for a regional model that provides for the delivery of emergency and non-emergency dispatch services.

Finding F2.2: The City of Stockton, as the contract provider of dispatch services to the Provider, is in the process of implementing a technology solution that will include implementing AVL capability at the dispatch center.

Finding F3.1: The Fire Chiefs who comprise the Board of Directors of the SJCRFDA have come to a consensus regarding EMS Policy 3202 and would like to see a change to that policy. Specifically, the agencies agree that local agencies should be able to determine what level of response is required to meet the expectations of the citizens it serves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation R1.1: The City of Stockton, as the contract provider of dispatch services to the Authority, completed an evaluation of the operation feasibility of utilizing VRECC's CAD/AVL technology. While the City of Stockton is not utilizing VRECC's technology, it is in the process of implementing the best technology solution for its dispatch center to allow it to continue to provide dispatch services.

Recommendation R1.3: The Authority will collaborate with the City of Stockton and JRUG to develop a plan to work toward consolidation into a single countywide emergency fire dispatch center. There are several examples of regional centers contiguous to San Joaquin County that can be used as model centers.

Recommendation R2.1: The City of Stockton, as the contract provider of dispatch services to the Authority, is in the process of implementing a technology solution that will include AVL on City of Stockton fire and emergency vehicles as well as those of the Authority member agencies.

Recommendation R2.2: Please see response to Recommendation R2.1.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Report.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Shipherd".

Kyle Shipherd, Chair of the Board
San Joaquin County Regional Fire Dispatch Authority