

California State Senate

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SUBCOMMITTEE
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 3
ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

March 19, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Philip Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Budget Request for Regional Fire Training Center in the Central Valley

Dear Chairs Skinner and Ting,

My district is in desperate need of a regional fire training facility to address critical training infrastructure needs which will ultimately help deliver the maximum fire protection and emergency response for the Central Valley. Fresno, the State's fifth-largest city – and the biggest in my district – lacks an adequate firefighter training facility. The current training facilities, which were built in the 1930s, are antiquated. The last major upgrade was in 1953. This facility has served the Fresno Metropolitan Area's needs for more than 90 years. The facility, however, was built for a department of 100 that protected a population of 50,000. Today, Fresno has more than 540,000 residents and 302 firefighters on staff. Furthermore, live fire drills using the 65-year-old burn tower ceased last year due to its proximity to a new Transformative Climate Communities housing project. Our emergency response training needs are in jeopardy. As a result, we are in need of State support to fund the new regional fire training facility's construction.

The city is positioned as a regional hub, which means this training center can help support fire personnel in surrounding cities and counties. Each year, Fresno hosts hundreds of fire

service training officers from across the state at the Training Officers Symposium, which is California's premiere fire-training event. While recognized for its professionalism, the department lacks the training facilities and required props to adequately train its own members. A regional training center would develop public safety professionals in the Central Valley both now and in the future. The wildfires that threaten California each fire season require assistance from fire agencies across the state through the master mutual aid system. Several of our members participate in the system to battle wildland fires. Our proposed regional training facility would host training courses and props (swiftwater prop, drafting pit, off-road driving course, classrooms, etc.) that are required for certification in the myriad of positions within a master mutual-aid response command structure. These courses are often attended by outside students, which reduces the overall cost of training for our members and can provide revenue. Some of the proposed specialized training props would be one-of-a-kind and become a training destination for agencies outside of the region.

The Central Valley now lacks access to the most vital components for the fire service – the ability to perform live-fire exercises and specialty training props. These exercises are recommended by both the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and Insurance Services Organization (ISO) and are critical in delivering maximum fire protection to the public while ensuring our firefighters' safety. A new facility will help enhance our region's emergency training and professional development so San Joaquin Valley departments are not forced to travel for this education. The facility would provide training for all new firefighter trainees, as well as specialized training across a variety of specialized disciplines including technical rescue, hazardous materials, fire investigations, swiftwater rescue, and public safety diving. It would include a burn tower, clean commercial tower, administrative building, classroom, mock fire station, and specialty training props. The regional Dispatch Center will be adjacent to the Training Center.

This new facility will help create a workforce pipeline, bringing the Central Valley closer to the state and national average ratio of firefighters-per-population. Fresno now has 305 firefighters for a population of 540,000 residents. This equates to .53 firefighters per 1,000 population, far below the national industry standard of 1-1.5 firefighters per 1,000 population for similar sized cities. The statewide average for metro departments is .92 per 1,000 population. This is highly unsatisfactory and opens up my region to countless vulnerabilities in an emergency. With this investment, we believe our current annual projected average of 20 recruits could be expanded, as we are able to accommodate a higher trainee capacity and offer training opportunities for professional development. Additionally, a new training center with adequate facilities could help alleviate the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts since our ability to train in person and in groups has been drastically reduced.

Homelessness also continues to be a significant community issue and affects a large portion of local first responder calls for service. Homeless activity is connected to the majority of vacant house fires and the increased fire calls pose increased risks to firefighters. Providing adequate facilities and live fire training will help reduce risk for the community and its firefighters. Keeping in mind the region's interests and needs, we could incorporate mental health training to better equip dispatchers and firefighters to handle the steady stream of mental health-related calls that come through emergency dispatch. There are active local efforts to develop a homeless response

program that may include a fire responder, medical provider, and mental health professional. This is another example of regional public safety partnerships meeting a community need.

Specifically, I am asking the Legislature to make the following \$25 million expenditure for FY 21-22. The City intends to build the new facility at an existing City-owned property located at 6115 Central Avenue. The location is 10 miles from the city center, which provides for live-fire training, and the parcel is large enough for future expansion. It is also adjacent to our Regional Police Training Facility. That facility trains not just Fresno police officers, but officers from other departments throughout the State and nation. Similarly, the City views the Regional Fire Training Center as a means to meet the fire-service training needs of not just Fresno, but the entire region – for generations to come. This would mean smaller fire departments from the region would not have to travel as far as Los Angeles or the Bay Area for training.

The proposed facility would include:

- Administration Building (\$1.7 million)
- Classroom Building #1 and Restrooms (\$1 M)
- Classroom Building #2 and Restrooms (\$1 M)
- Training Center/Apparatus storage (\$2 M)
- Multi story commercial training structure (\$3 M)
- 2 story residential training structure (\$1 M)
- Driver training pad (4 acres) (\$2 M)
 - US&R Training Prop (\$500,000)
 - HazMat Training Prop (\$300,000)
 - Confined space and Trench rescue Prop (\$150,000)
 - Live fire site props (\$482,000)
 - Vehicle extrication area (\$55,000)
 - Swiftwater Training Prop (\$740,000)
 - Asphalt Parking area for staff/students (\$250,000)
 - Infrastructure and site development including water supply, electrical, communication, contaminated water recovery (\$11.1 M)
 - Contractor/Architectural work (\$1.75 million)

This would be a one-time capital outlay investment to develop this training site and facilitate stronger emergency response partnerships throughout the region.

As a result, additional training deliveries across multiple disciplines could be achieved, including:

- Communications (Emergency)
- Technical Rescue
- Hazardous Materials
- Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT)
- California State Fire Marshal Training Certification Curriculum
- Type 3 Incident Management Team
- CPR and First Aid training for civilians and private industry

Last year's, Creek Fire overwhelmed the region. Neighboring cities and counties were hard pressed to provide fire suppression and evacuation services. The City of Fresno stepped in and demonstrated its capacity to serve as a central distribution point for resources and assistance, including the mass evacuation of fire victims. The Department also dedicated command and

suppression personnel to help mitigate the fire. The training facility would serve as an ideal location to store and stage apparatus that would be used in unforeseen emergencies.

There is a great need in the Central Valley and we will not be starting with a blank canvas. This \$25 million investment will help meet our goal of developing a full-service regional training center in my district that can elevate our region's ability to further develop our workforce, contribute to the state's emergency response efforts, and ensure we are fully prepared and staffed for any type of emergency response.

I look forward to working with you and thank you for your consideration of this important matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Elizabeth Hess, at Elizabeth.Hess@sen.ca.gov or by calling at (916) 651-4014.

Sincerely,



Melissa Hurtado
Senator, 14th District

CC: Senator Melissa Hurtado, Author
Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Committee on Budget
Assemblymember Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget