



AMERICAN CANYON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
BOARD AGENDA
APRIL 22, 2025

STAFF REPORT
BUSINESS
ITEM NUMBER: 5.

TITLE

Fighting Fire with Funding

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and file the report, "Fighting Fire with Funding", the Urgent need for Adequate Fire Service Resources in California.

CONTACT

Geoff Belyea, Fire Chief

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

In February 2025, the Fire Districts Association of California (FDAC), in partnership with California Fire Chiefs Association and the California Volunteer and Combination Chiefs released a white paper titled Fighting Fire with Funding. This document presents an urgent appeal to state policymakers, emphasizing the critical funding shortfall that is impacting California's local fire services.

Local agencies, including independent fire districts, serve more than 39 million residents across 125,782 square miles. Yet, they are operating under outdated funding structures that have not evolved to meet the growing demands of modern emergency response.

As part of these advocacy efforts, Chief Belyea and the members of FDAC's Executive Board met with representatives from the Governor's Office and the Speaker of the Assembly to discuss the white paper's findings and reinforce the urgent need for a sustainable funding framework for Fire Protection Districts. An additional meeting is scheduled with Senate President Pro Tempore Mike McGuire in the near future.

The Fighting Fire with Funding white paper outlines several critical challenges facing California's fire service. Over the past 50 years, California's fire districts have transformed from focusing mainly on rural and urban fires suppression to providing a broad range of all-risk services – including emergency medical calls and hazardous materials incidents, technical rescues and wildfire response. Emergency medical services (EMS) now account for the majority of today's call volume, and wildfire responses have intensified over past decade, pushing the mutual aid system to its limits. Notably, during recent fires in Eaton and Pacific Palisades, over 60% of personnel deployed came from local

fire agencies—demonstrating just how essential these local resources are to the state’s overall emergency response system.

Yet the funding model for these expanded responsibilities remains antiquated. Proposition 13 (1978) and the Assembly Bill 8 (1979) locked in fire district revenues based on 1970s service levels. These outdated mechanisms offer no way to adjust funding for modern needs. Proposition 218 (1996) further limited local revenue options by requiring a two-thirds vote for new or increased taxes and assessments, making it difficult for fire districts to generate the revenue needed to meet modern service demands.

Rising costs driven by inflation, evolving professional standards, stricter building codes, and regulatory mandates have placed additional strain on already-limited local budgets. Labor costs have risen significantly, reflecting increased wages, benefits and the need to remain competitive amid recruiting challenges. Occupational health and safety standards have evolved considerably, leading to higher workers’ compensation costs and the implementation of mental health and wellness programs.

Simultaneously, the technology boom has transformed fire service operations, requiring continual investment in software, communications systems, and digital infrastructure. Unfunded mandates and costly capital facility requirements have led many agencies to defer vital projects. The white paper also highlights disparities in cost recovery, noting that fire districts face more restrictive revenue limitations compared to city and county counterparts. As a result, many districts struggle to maintain adequate staffing, training, and equipment. This underfunding directly impacts California’s mutual aid system, which relies heavily on local agencies. The growing number of “Unable to Fill” (UTF) requests indicate a clear sign of increasing strain, putting both local communities and state emergency response network at risk.

Call to Action: The Fighting Fire with Funding white paper urges California’s leaders to develop sustainable long-term funding solutions. The key issue is funding, not just equipment. Investing in more fire engines or tools will not address the crisis if agencies lack the staff and resources to deploy them. Instead, the focus must be on modernizing funding streams and fixing outdated laws so local fire services can maintain safe staffing, up-to-date training, and resilient infrastructure to protect our communities.

FISCAL IMPACT

None. This report is informational.

BOARD PRIORITY PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Public Safety: "Ensure American Canyon remains a safe community"

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

No environmental review is required, as the proposed action is not a “project” pursuant to the

California Environmental Quality Act and has no potential for causing an impact on the environment.

ATTACHMENTS:

[Fighting Fire with Funding](#)