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Southern Inyo Fire Protection District

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July 27, 2022

Inyo County Superior Court
Judge Stephen M. Place
P. O. Box 1508
Bishop, CA 93515

RE: Inyo County Grand Jury Report on School Fire Safety Inspection

Dear Judge Place,

We are writing to acknowledge receipt of the Inyo County Grand Jury Report on School Fire Safety Inspection. We thank the jury for its recent efforts to improve fire protection in Inyo County.

We are also writing to report that we are already addressing this issue. Currently, however, we are challenged by the fact that we do not have a qualified local fire inspector and must rely on CAL FIRE to perform the inspection of the Death Valley Academy in Shoshone. The superintendent of the Death Valley Unified School District has expressed extreme dissatisfaction with this solution and has stated an unwillingness to work with CAL FIRE. We are still talking with him in hopes of coming to an agreement.

Our current plan is to have our fire chief train with the CAL FIRE marshal who comes out to perform the inspections in our district this year so that, hereafter, our chief can perform them at significantly less cost to our residents. We are still waiting for the businesses that, in addition to the school, are requiring inspection to schedule appointments with CAL FIRE. We will now take a more proactive role in urging them to do so.

We are in perfect agreement with the performance of yearly inspections, especially given the current drought and fire risk, and will continue to work toward total compliance for the safety and welfare of our children and our community. We are also working to make sure that this does not place an undue burden on our community going forward.

We were working on the remedies recommended in the report even before receiving it and are confident that we could be in compliance by the dates given, however, if we cannot come to a mutually satisfactory agreement with the school superintendent, the state fire marshal informs us that he cannot force the inspection. If this issue cannot be resolved, we are at a loss as to how to proceed.

Thank you again for your efforts. We also wish to express appreciation for your acknowledgment of how much the volunteer fire departments are struggling at present. The Grand Jury report indicates that SIFPD does not have a full board of directors, however it does, in fact, have the full five required members and has done so almost continuously except for a few short gaps of time over the past few years. In our District, the board of directors meets monthly and some board members are actively and regularly involved in problem solving and hands on work, from things like writing this letter, to fundraising, to manual labor for site improvements, and more. Even so, the ever changing conditions in the world at large make our work more difficult by the day. We struggled through the pandemic with staff changeovers and are working to bring our service into full compliance with all governing regulations. It is good to know that there are mechanisms in place to ensure we do not fall through the cracks.

All the best,

Robin Flinchum, President, SIFPD Board of Directors