



September 26, 2015

Snohomish County Executive John Lovick
Snohomish County Courthouse
3000 Rockefeller Ave.
Everett, WA. 98201

Dear Executive Lovick:

After many years of voicing our challenges in working with two separate 911 communication centers there is hope on the horizon. Fire District 7 has struggled as an agency divided by the lines of PSAP designation for 911 calls and communications using the two dispatch agencies. The delays in transfers of callers seeking urgent help have been documented many times over. The communication system consolidation is one of these districts biggest goals and we want to assure the momentum of solving these issues does not lose the inertia in moving this to fruition.

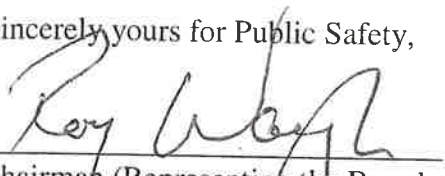
Being the only agency in Snohomish County that depends on both dispatch agencies for primary dispatch services, we see the challenges daily in our internal operations. Both dispatch agencies provide excellent services and have dedicated talented employees. But that actually adds to the frustration of dual services when you think of what they could accomplish together with those talented employees. We alluded to our challenges and we would like to share just a few of these that we experience daily so you might actually understand why we place such a high importance on restructuring our emergency communications system. We say challenges as an acceptable politically correct term. The reality is in many insances these challenges affect firefighter safety and far exceed the word "challenge".

Our organization proudly serves the area that includes the City of Mill Creek and its surrounding area up to Everett city limits and east to nearly Monroe and then south bordering the Snohomish King County line down to Bothell. Agencies to the East and five of our stations are dispatched by Snopac. Agencies to the West and one of our stations (Station 76 our busiest station) are dispatched by Snocom. When an alarm is dispatched that includes station 76 into the Snocom area the crew at Station 76 must acknowledge the call on Snocom channel, change channels and tell Snopac they are assigned to a Snocom call, then switch back to a Snocom channel to get the response information. When the call is completed they must switch back to Snopac and inform them they are available for another alarm. This may seem to be a simple task but let me assure you there are several issues. During the change in channel the Snocom dispatcher will often provide valuable information while the unit has changed channels to inform Snopac of its response. This missed information can be very important, such as telling the unit to stage and wait for police due to a violent offender at the scene, or information that a victim needs rescue from the rear of building on fire. It is an area of failure that we have experienced several times over. The same situation applies to units from our other stations responding into Snocom controlled area. In a multi-apparatus response multiply the above by five units. There is a barrage of changing channels and communicating with both dispatch agencies. The changing of channels by itself is a recognized concern for any event. We know that channel changing during incidents is and has been a major contributing factor in injuries and deaths of firefighters. While it is necessary to change channels, it is definitely an area to minimize. Most all

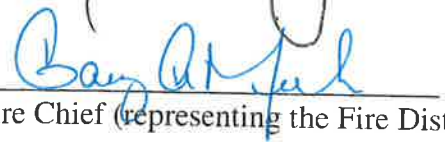
firefighters are painfully aware of the Blackstock Fire in Seattle where Lieutenant Matthew Johnson lost his life fighting this fire. One of the major factors contributing to his death was his repeated calls for help that were unheard because his radio was on a channel that was not monitored. We have stressed the importance of channel selection and double check of the channel selection, but just a few weeks ago during a fire fight in Mill Creek one of our Deputy Chiefs heard one of our firefighters attempting to communicate important information to command on an incorrect channel. The thoughts of the Blackstock fire tragedy immediately came to mind. Luckily our Deputy Chief heard the firefighter on the wrong channel and was able to communicate with him and correct the channel assignment. Field communications is not the only issue facing our dispatch system. PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) division has been and will continue to be an issue where transfer of callers is required. As we stated earlier there are multiple stories of callers being repeatedly transferred in attempt to get them to the correct dispatch center. While the consolidating of dispatch agencies and creating one PSAP in Snohomish County will not solve all of these issues it will eliminate one of the possible transfers and it will eliminate the line that now exists for the delivery of these calls. We know that in several areas of PSAP designation area that the caller has a 50/50 chance of getting the correct center depending on fire or police related call. You only have to ask yourself, if your child was not breathing or your loved one was being harmed, do you want to be transferred even once?

Gordon Graham a well-known national speaker has a phrase that he often uses in his presentations "*If it is predictable it is preventable*". We live with these issues daily of complicated communications in working with two separate dispatch agencies. We emphasize training in an effort to compensate for the challenges but it is our sincerest hope that we will not look back and say it was preventable. We have many examples of problems, too many to write in this letter. We the Board of Commissioner of Fire District 7 and all 103 employees of the District are unanimous in pleading that you solve this issue now before we say we should have done more. Any injury or death that is affected by poor communications is preventable. Do you have the courage to prevent bureaucracy and politics from getting in the way of doing the right thing?

Sincerely yours for Public Safety,



Chairman (Representing the Board of Commissioners)



Fire Chief (representing the Fire District 7 staff)



IAFF #2781 Union president (Representing the firefighters and officers of Fire District 7)

- CC: County Council Member Terry Ryan
County Council Member Brian Sullivan
County Council Member Stephanie Wright
County Council Member Ken Klien
County Council Member Dave Somers
Snopac Director Kurt Mills
Snocom Acting Director Terry Peterson
Snohomish County E911 Director Laura Caster