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Stockton Firefighters Initial Response to Civil Grand Jury Report

Where's the news? The City of Stockton can save money if it employs fewer firefighters. We doubt anyone would disagree with that. Much smaller cities, with less area and fewer challenges staff their engines with fewer people. Again, where's the news?

While this report may be a great political tool, it is a horrible analytical tool.

The Civil Grand Jury's report fails to perform any serious analysis as to the appropriate staffing levels for the Stockton community. Further, its own report admits that it failed to look at the only two, independent, scientifically valid studies on fire department staffing levels completed by the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST). Instead, the Grand Jury reviewed political campaign material. The report also purposely omits a significant number of people the Stockton Fire Department protects when attempting to make staffing comparisons with smaller cities.

Zero Analysis on Service Levels/Impacts

It is incredible that a study on staffing levels actually provides zero analysis on the service impacts of reducing staffing.

Upon reading the report you'll notice token mention of the OSHA regulation requiring "2 in 2 out" when conducting search and rescue operations for structure fires. What does this mean? **Simply, it means that unless there is a known victim, Stockton residents would have to wait for two engines to arrive at their home before rescue operations can commence.** If the Grand Jury had conducted a more thorough analysis it would have reported that approximately 27% of time, the Stockton Fire Department responds with its "second due" engine because the "first due" is already out on a call. Thus, residents would now need to wait for 2nd and 3rd due engines prior to rescue operations commencing.

The report states that the OSHA standard is the same in Manteca as it is in Stockton, but it fails to ask even the most basic question, "how quickly can each city get two engines to an emergency?" Modesto, for example, has 11 engine companies and 2 truck companies to protect 210,000 people and 39 square miles. Stockton, on the other hand, has 13 engine

companies and three truck companies to protect 350,000 people and 75 square miles. These figures are critically important in establishing how quickly two companies can arrive to an emergency call. As you can see, Stockton has roughly the same number of fire companies as Modesto, but must cover a significantly higher population and larger geographical footprint.

Additionally, the report does zero analysis on the recently commissioned independent studies on fire and emergency medical staffing. Both reports clearly demonstrate that four-person companies complete critical tasks (such as getting water onto a fire, ventilation, etc) much quicker than 3-person companies. Why was there no review or mention of these readily available reports?

The most critical aspect of the study that Grand Jury failed to report on as it relates to the three person companies was the following conclusion: **3 member crews cannot be assembled into a full alarm (15 firefighters) within the national standard of 8 minutes.**

Further, the report completely glosses over the medical service component of the Stockton Fire Department—which as the report points out—makes up the bulk of our Department’s calls for service. If they would have read the report, they would discover that the 4-person crew provides the community with the following benefits:

- **4 member crews completed treatment on cardiac patients faster than 3 and 2 member crews.**
- **4 member crews complete treatment on trauma patients 20% faster than 3-member crews and 35% faster than 2-member crews.**
- **4 member crews were able to administer oxygen to patients 1 minute faster than 3 member crews**
- **4 member crews checked vital signs 30 seconds faster than 3 member crews and 1:20 faster than 2 member crews.**
- **4 member crews were able to immobilize spinal injuries 2 minutes faster than 3 and 2 member crews.**
- **4 member crews were able to intubation patients 2 minutes faster than 3 and 2 member crews.**

While the Grand Jury may be of the opinion that the residents of Stockton would be better off with slower responses, they should at least highlight this service reduction as a trade off. Unfortunately, more time is spent discussing the compensation of the fire fighter versus the actual service levels impacted by the recommendations.

Flawed Data

One of the greatest errors is in a very fundamental number: number of residents served. The report creates a significant undercount of the number of residents served by purposefully excluding the communities Stockton Fire serves through contract. The report provides the figure of 291,707 when the Stockton Fire Department actually serves approximately 350,000 people.

The exclusion of 58,000 people (artificially lowering the number of residents served by 17%) greatly affects the firefighter per capita figure, but it also ignores the fact that Stockton Fire Department operates as one system. Thus, resources used serving the areas of “contract” communities are the exact same personnel and equipment serving the residents within the City of Stockton proper.

The report erroneously concludes that Stockton should be compared to the cities of Manteca, Lodi and Tracy as opposed to other larger cities in Northern California because they are more alike. This completely ignores the fact that Stockton is in fact much more urban than those three cities, has a functional inland port, a significantly older housing stock and broader industrial base (increasing risk of hazardous materials), an airport and expansive waterway threats—all of which lead to much more complex fire and medical responses.

Conclusion

While the Grand Jury raises an important question as to what should the appropriate staffing level of a fire department be, it does absolutely no analysis into actual service delivery. It focuses solely on costs—which is a dangerous position to take when discussing how best to protect 350,000 people. That being stated, Stockton Firefighters remain engaged in active conversations with the City of Stockton on compensation changes as well as the appropriate staffing levels for our city.

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