



## COSUMNES FIRE DEPARTMENT

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July 7, 2020

The Honorable Miguel Santiago  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 6027  
Sacramento, California 95814

### **RE: SB 431 (MCGUIRE) – AMENDMENTS REQUESTED**

Dear Chairman Santiago:

The public safety community is facing challenges we could not have predicted a year ago. Local first responders face force reductions due to the worst budget climate in more than a decade. Firefighting and evacuations will be more difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dramatically complicating our efforts to respond to these unforeseen events are the now all-to-common challenge of widespread Public Safety Power Shutoffs, which last year, impacted dozens of counties and millions of consumers.

We believe it is critical to prioritize backup power for emergency responder facilities; deploy all useful assets, including on-site, mobile and multiple energy technologies; and reduce the frequency, size, and duration of power shutoffs themselves, as the best way to mitigate the risks they pose. **That's why we are asking you to amend SB 431 to ensure that as we enter upcoming fire seasons our teams on the front line can count on a reliable communications network.**

We understand that power shutoffs can be a necessary evil to prevent fires, but they should not be allowed to become an ongoing policy of choice. Power shutoffs create a downstream public safety risk, disrupting hospitals, transportation, communications and state and local public safety operations.

As you consider amendments to SB 431 we are writing to offer a public safety perspective to inform those changes.

**One size does not fit all. Keep all options on the table to keep communities connected and ensure public transparency.** As many stakeholders have noted, as long as communication services remain operational, the goal has been met. There are multiple ways to meet this goal and allowing multiple ways to meet this goal is critical for public safety. While some may support

certain energy technologies or have a preference for on-site versus mobile backup power, ultimately what is needed is service continuity and rapid restoral.

Practically speaking, we understand that not all technical solutions can be implemented in all areas or on an acceptable timeframe. On-site backup power, while ideal in many cases, cannot be deployed at all sites and certainly not universally in a timely manner. There are many sites where it is physically impossible or potentially dangerous to have multiple refrigerator sized cabinets in place. During a crisis every useful solution, whether fixed or mobile, must be deployed in a strategic manner. We urge you to make sure this necessary flexibility is clearly reflected in SB 431.

**Prioritize emergency communications that will support first responders and people evacuating during wildfires.** We urge your Committee to focus on the most urgent communications needs for public safety. Ensuring that wireless facilities, fire stations, police stations, hospitals, and emergency command and dispatch centers in Tier 2 and 3 High Fire-Threat Districts remain connected during power outages is critical.

**Aggressively reduce the scope and frequency of power shutoffs – do not allow power shutoffs to become the policy of choice.** Backup power arrangements for the downstream users of commercial power is at best a stopgap. There is no real substitute for commercial power and no practical way to arrange backup power for the countless essential critical equipment types and services consumers need, including dialysis machines, wheelchairs and pharmaceutical refrigeration.

California has already experienced 60% more wildfires between January 1 and May 10 of this year compared to last year. Staying focused on the specific emergency communications needed during wildfires and being ready to deploy an array of assets, is an important next step in our readiness.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback.

Sincerely,



Michael W. McLaughlin, CFO  
Fire Chief  
Cosumnes Fire Department