

January 13, 2005

Little Hoover Commission
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RE: Little Hoover Commission Testimony

The California Fire Chiefs Association appreciates the opportunity to present our point of view regarding the California Performance Review recommendations relating to the Emergency Medical Services Commission, the State Board of Fire Services and the Building Standards Commission. Each of these entities directly impacts a number of important fire service issues and provides expertise, regulations and guidelines that are essential to the California fire service. We look forward to working with the Little Hoover Commission to ensure the vital functions conducted by these entities are protected.

CALIFORNIA EMS COMMISSION

The EMS Commission serves as the prominent group within California that provides for a multi-disciplinary review of California EMS issues. The EMS Commission has served as an effective forum for stakeholder input regarding regulation and coordination of California EMS. Losing this Commission would result in a reduction of access to the state regulatory process by the many interest groups that have a vital interest and expertise in the areas of emergency medical services. Being that the Commission is voluntary and administrated with existing staff at the State EMS Authority, discontinuing this Commission would provide minimal cost savings and represent a significant loss to California EMS systems participants. Additionally, elimination of the EMS Commission would place full authority for the development and implementation of regulation into the hands of an appointed director. This would eliminate a valid system of checks and balances that currently exists.

STATE BOARD OF FIRE SERVICES

The elimination of the State Board of Fire Services (SBFS) would virtually eliminate the ability of members of the California fire service (chiefs, fire prevention officers, fire fighters and others) to impact decisions at the state level. The loss of the SBFS would create huge questions regarding the future of State Fire Training and the other functions currently carried out by the Board. The loss of the SBFS would remove the statutorily protected input into issues under the purview of the Office of the State Fire Marshal. This proposed action is in stark contrast to current discussions with CDF Director Dale Geldert and other state officials about returning the OSFM to its once prominent position in the California Fire Service.

If the California fire service is going to maintain its position as the best trained and integrated emergency response network in the nation. California fire service training curriculum and standards must be maintained in an up-to-date and credible manner. To that end, the SBFS is the authorized body providing this oversight and approval just as the Peace Officers Standards of Training Commission (POST) provides these functions for law enforcement agencies throughout the state.

In addition, the California fire service operates under the Incident Command System (ICS). This ICS system has been recognized as the organizational standard for emergency management nationwide. As part of this system, the State of California has adopted a certification and qualification system. This system was created to ensure that all individuals filling ICS positions on an emergency incident are properly trained and experienced to ensure incidents are run properly and in a safe manner. The SBFS is the agency that approves and monitors the requirements of the established certification and qualification system. To eliminate this oversight, the approval body would put at risk the established system of certifications and qualifications and impact the ability to ensure a qualified pool of fire service professionals are available to provide large-scale incident oversight and management throughout the State.

BUILDING STANDARDS COMMISSION

The California Fire Chiefs Association believes the process for selecting building codes should be objective and focused on providing the highest level of safety in the most efficient manner. Codes adopted by the Commission affect buildings approved at the local level, not the state and need to have local interests represented in the approval process. The current Building Standards Commission (BSC) is an open forum, containing representatives with various expertise who are able to conduct informed analysis and assimilate input received from various stakeholder groups.

It is essential that this approval and oversight body exist with diverse backgrounds and specialized expertise for development and approval of technical code and standards documents. The Commission utilizes advisory committees with representation from stakeholder groups to gain insight and information to aid the decision making process. These advisory committees are essential to ensure that stakeholder groups, such as the California Fire Chiefs Association, are able to offer input and experience based data to ensure decisions are made with the most accurate and objective information available.

To place this function under one state agency may result in decisions being made without the benefit of a broader review platform. The California Fire Chiefs Association believes it would be a step backward in the building codes and standards development process. We do not view it is in the best interest of a fire safe California to discontinue the work of this vital Commission.

While the California Fire Chiefs Association does not agree with all the recommendations of the California Performance Review Task Force (CPR), we applaud the work completed by the CPR Task Force and the spirit in which it was conducted. It is apparent much effort and thoughtful consideration was put forth in formulating the recommendations. The California Fire Chiefs Association is committed to continuing its work with the Governor, Legislature and the Little Hoover Commission to implement changes that will ensure the citizens of California continue to receive the highest levels of service and protection possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Warren". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Chief Michael Warren, President
California Fire Chiefs Association

MLW/tlv