Rodeo Hercules Fire District Board of Directors,

I write to you today as a Fire Captain and leader at the Rodeo-Hercules Fire District. I have 16 years in the fire service in many different capacities and levels. There are 20 Firefighters, Engineers, Captains and Chiefs that intimately know the fire service model that is needed to effectively serve this community like no one else. In this letter I am speaking as one of those individuals. I would like to share just a few of my thoughts on the benefits of annexation for this community and encourage you to please read with an open mind. My list of specific enhancements in detail are listed by category below.

Firefighter safety: Firefighter safety would be increased through this annexation. Contra Costa County Fire Protection District has 24/7 coverage district-wide with a safety officer. The safety officer is to respond to high risk incidents,and ensure safe work practices are being employed. We recently commemorated the anniversary of the sacrifice of Matt Burton and Scott Desmond who died in the line of duty trying to save the lives of multiple members of the community in San Pablo. A contributing factor in the fatality report was different agencies operating individually. Bringing more of Battalion 7's departments under the same roof, aligning training standards, operating procedures, and accountability will aid in increasing firefighter safety and wellness and can prevent future firefighter fatalities.

An industry-wide issue in today's fire service is Workers Comp benefits. Workers Comp systems create sluggish responses that can delay rehabilitation which creates a negative result in the health and wellness of the employee. This leads to more overtime, costing taxpayers more as recovery times increase, potentially leading to long term disability. As a progressive district, CCCFPD is working on a proactive solution. Using their vast depth of resources, they have come up with a new state-of-the-art wellness program that is one of the only two of its kind in the entire nation. It is an exciting time for Contra Costa County Fire as they have become nationwide leaders for the fire service through this endeavour. They now have two sports medicine trainers at the disposal of its members to aid in injury prevention and rehabilitation and bring employees back to work faster and healthier than what the Workers Comp program could achieve on its own. By taking a proactive approach they have realized savings from fewer worker comp claims and future long term medical disability claims. This is one example of the sort of progression and fiscal responsibility RHFD cannot achieve due to the lack of depth and structure.

Employee Attrition: Attrition has been a huge problem in our agency. We've hired 20 firefighters in the last 10 years. Keep in mind we are only an 18-member department. We keep losing new employees. Firefighters are cut from the same cloth nationwide, we all have a special drive to serve our public. With that said, our members are leaving because other departments are providing better opportunities to serve their communities. Opportunities such as fully developed training divisions, prevention divisions, specialty rescue programs and more. RHFD flushes money down the drain that we have invested in the hiring process which includes: testing, backgrounds, psychological evaluations, interviews and more. If hired, there is an additional loss of money spent for the new employees' 10-shift training and about an

additional $10,000 for PPE that is fitted specifically for that individual. The financial loss caused by lack of attrition adds up rapidly. However, the unforeseen accumulative impact due to high attrition results in low morale and also a less experienced workforce. Morale and experience are two contributing factors that can greatly affect a department's service and effectiveness. Con Fire hires many firefighters at once, putting on full academies which cuts costs through economies of scale. Contra Costa County Fire is a destination department that top candidates seek out and compete to work at. These employees ultimately dedicate their entire career towards their one community. Morale loss is prevented, and experience is retained making their department's service model effective.

Training: Training is my specialty and is near and dear to me so I have quite a bit to say about it. I am a qualified state instructor and am a subject matter expert in this area. A department's training is what keeps its firefighters and citizens safe and prepared for emergency calls. Take a look at training chronologically in the two departments side by side. Let's start with Rodeo Hercules Fire District. As a new hire you will get 10 days of initial training from your on-duty crew which is available for calls in their district. The days calls that occur during this training interfere with the day's training. The training is led by a 10-shift book that the Captain must follow. The book includes teaching administrative tasks and a series of manipulative drills that must be performed throughout the day by the cadet. The day only allows the cadet to attempt each drill one or two times. The standards of training will vary from Captain to Captain and the nuances on how to perform tasks may also differ which has caused new employees to struggle the passing of their training 10-shift. Once the 10 days of new hire training are complete, the new hire's probation begins. There is a probationary task book to guide the new hire during probationary training but there are no standards on how the training tasks are to be done. Some of the task book tasks are antiquated and not accurate. There is no support staff in the district to support training, update tasks books or create/update training standards although it is greatly needed. At RHFD, promoted employees receive a task book to guide them through their new job. At the Engineer rank the Captain teaches the components in the task book. At the Captain rank they are self-taught. As the first line in leadership in serving the community, the training at this level is paramount to sustain a high level of service. RHFD would require new training officer positions to handle these deficiencies; it will cost the district multiple hundreds of thousands of taxpayers dollars. Keep in mind this is only one area and we have many others to cover.

In contrast, Contra Costa County Fire has done very well and is set up well as it relates to training. New hires get a full 18-week academy taught by dedicated training staff and guest instructors who specialize in the topics being taught. The curriculum being taught is prepared and updated long before the academy by their training division staff. Their training has standards the cadet is required to meet. This high quality first impression of training that is placed on employees early in one's career sets the tone for a superior level of service provided in the agency's service model. Once the employees graduate and begin their interactions with the community throughout the rest of their career the service model improves. For this reason training is a top priority for any fire service agency. The training division at Contra Costa County Fire consists of a full-time dedicated training Chief, 4 full-time dedicated training Captains and

roughly 10 part-time student workers to help out on training activities as needed. Contra Costa also has 3 training facilities where the scope of training is unrestricted. Two training towers, a state of the art burn building for realistic training. Not to mention the special training development programs contra costa county fire provides its employees. Each promotion you get a full academy to provide promoted employees with the tools needed to go out and be successful in serving the community in their new role. Contra Costa County Fire also provides employees specialty training opportunities such as water rescue, dozer operations, hand crew operations, Hazardous Materials, Heavy Rescue, Boat rescue/firefighting, Confined space, Truck academy and more. These specialty training opportunities are brought back out into the field where services are provided directly to the community having a direct impact on increasing Contra Costa County Fires service model to the community.

RHFD has limited resources to offer specialty training to the community. We cover vast amounts of water and shoreline with no open water training or resources. Our community would benefit greatly from Contra Costa County Fire's water and boat rescue/firefighting program. Training in these areas is what allows us to save the lives of the members of the community. Case in point: I remember early in my career watching the city of Alameda Fire Dept. who had recently ended their water rescue program. I saw them standing on the shore while a member of their community drowned and ultimately died. I could not believe what I had just watched. In my time at RHFD on two separate occasions I have found myself standing at our shoreline with a 50-foot rope watching members of our communities struggling as they attempt to stay alive in the current of the bay located roughly 200 feet offshore. They were out of reach. I remember in that moment feeling helpless, unable to help, and thinking about how Contra Costa County Fire has the training and resources to act. This person in the water drowning in front of me is counting on me to help… and I cannot. Contra Costa County Fire has a thriving boat program as well as swift/open water rescue program. If we had been Contra Costa County Fire we could easily have a water rescue asset implemented into our community. Not to mention Contra Costa County Fire has a rescue helicopter at their district's disposal at a moments notice which is paramount to the life-saving success of any search and rescue. These are life saving tools that we can have at our fingertips to better serve and save our community. We simply do not have these capabilities- we are qualified for shore-based rescue only. We get a rope that is 50 feet long and a lifejacket for our personnel to wear as they stand on the shoreline. You can decide which service model is better for yourself, but as a firefighter who deals with this on a regular basis I see the obvious service enhancement Contra Costa County Fire would provide this community. This is one specific example on how training and qualifications affect community safety and community level of service.

Contra Costa County Fire also has a rescue/firefighting helicopter at its disposal that our community could greatly benefit from. In my time as a wildland firefighter I learned first hand as a helicopter-based firefighter that aircraft help save community members' lives and save community members' homes… period. Our vast wildland urban interface would benefit greatly from this service that Contra Costa County Fire provides. RHFD will never have a helicopter or any service that would come close to providing the coverage similar to a helicopter. These few examples just scratch the surface of benefits of training and special programs Contra Costa

County offers our community members. There are many more examples I could talk about in great detail but I will mention a few others: bulldozers, handcrews for firefighting as well as fire fuels mitigation/prevention, and communications. In this topic alone the enhancements that Contra Costa County Fire can provide are pretty clear. Our communities' lives are what matter to me and I believe they deserve these enhancements.

Accountability: I have heard many public comments about Battalion 7's agreement with the RHFD and how this provides all the depth the community needs. I completely disagree. Having a unified Battalion 7 under one roof isn't just better for firefighter safety and standardized training - it's better for the community. Right now if there is a serious medical emergency in the area of Hercules Ave and San Pablo Ave of our district station 76 in Hercules would respond. The closest emergency unit to this area is actually engine 73 from Pinole located on Tennant Ave. Because we have jurisdictional boundaries the closest unit does not get sent. Instead, the jurisdiction associated with the taxpayer's address gets sent. If we are to have better accountability to our service model, regional consolidation would be the answer! Drop the jurisdictional boundaries through consolidation of resources. This would improve response times by over 200% in the Hercules Ave. area of our fire district's jurisdiction once Pinole contracts services to Contra Costa County Fire. There is a big picture solution.

An integral part of function missing at RHFD is accountability. Accountability is integral to providing a superior fire service model. Without proper accountability, how will our fire department ensure we are providing consistent and proper services to our community? Right now, RHFD only has one Battalion Chief-level supervisor on duty for one of the 3 shifts. That leaves 2 shifts with severe holes in the structure of the organization affecting its function. That means 66% of the total organization's leaders operate without direct supervision. Imagine going to work everyday in these conditions. Is having no direct supervision over 66% of your organization's structure healthy for day-to-day operations and effectiveness? Consider how a 66% lack of supervision and accountability in any agency would affect its end product of service. Annexing with Contra Costa County Fire will increase the function of accountability by 33% through bringing another Battalion Chief position and entire shift under the same roof. It's time for better service- and that opportunity is presented before you now.

In conclusion, annexation would greatly benefit our community. Hopefully I have explained some specific service model representations that the general public is not educated on. The average member of the public deals with fire emergency services about one time per their lifetime. The members of our public only somewhat know their current fire services and most definitely do not know Contra Costa County's Fire service model and the reality of the benefits annexing would bring to our community. However, we have all been hearing lots of speculation on both RHFD and Contra Costa County Fire service models expressed from the community. I hope this letter helps to scratch the surface of reality when it comes to the enhancements of annexation between the two agencies. If we are to try and bring some of these services to our community on our own we will spend well over 3.5-4 million and still be left with a lesser quality product and not to mention a duplication of services that waste more tax payer dollars.

In what world can you increase your business model that would normally cost you 3.5-4 million per year not just for free but in fact with an overall cost savings? Not only would we avoid spending millions in duplicated fire services but we would save taxpayers millions of dollars through cost savings of economies of scale. Contra Costa County Fire District per station provides their services substantially cheaper per year than RHFD currently does. With that said we would also fall under their current Fire Chief. The result is additional cost savings by not paying for RHFD Fire Chief and admin staff. You have the obligation to maintain fiscal responsibility for your tax payers. This annexation is the fiscally responsible thing to do with our tax dollars. I believe a situation like this is a rare opportunity to be able to increase your local service model while saving roughly 3.5-4 million dollars in your budget. There are many agencies nationwide who would be envious of this opportunity. I advise talking to Contra Costa County Fire Chief Broschard and speaking with him personally about possible enhancements and community concerns of local control. He is the expert.

Thank you for your time and hope you consider what I have said.

Derek Cochnauer