Dear Rodeo-Hercules Fire District and community members,

My name is Donovan Kiel and I was employed with Rodeo-Hercules Fire District from July 2014 to November 2019. I would like to start by apologizing for not being able to attend tonight's meeting as I am currently deployed at the Dixie fire. I was hired as a Firefighter/Emt and worked to complete paramedic school and later promoted to Engineer/Paramedic. I am writing you to share my experience while working for the Fire District and serving the amazing citizens within the communities of Rodeo and Hercules.

I want you to understand that the RHFD was more than a job. Though I did not live in Rodeo-Hercules, my family spent every 4th of July morning in the community, with my kids participating in the fun run and watching and/or being a part of the parade. Even if I was working, my wife, who likes to sleep in, would wake up early so the boys can enjoy the Fourth of July festivities. We would also come enjoy the car show, chili cook-off, the bay trail, parks and other festivities the community had to offer.

My time serving the citizens of Rodeo and Hercules was extremely rewarding in many ways. RHFD has lots of support from the community. Making the decision to leave the RHFD was a difficult one, for I felt a connection to the communities I served and my fellow firefighters that I considered family. Working at a small 2 station department had some advantages. Being able to have a bigger voice in the direction of the Department, an intimate knowledge of the community, and a close family like relationship with your coworkers were some of the reasons I enjoyed working for RHFD.

Despite this, the reasons for leaving outweighed the reasons to stay. The Fire service is more than just a job it is a career and a passion for us. As I looked forward to my goals and the areas I am most passionate about within the Fire service it became quite apparent I would not be able to accomplish them while working for RHFD. My desire to be able to work on a tiller truck, my love for rope rescue, and my interest in boat rescue were unavailable due to the limited resources RHFD could provide.

As a Firefighter i want nothing more than to provide the best possible service while coming home safely to my family. In order to do that we take classes and gain on the job work experience. With only 2 stations my desire to gain that experience and apply the knowledge I learned in classes was severely limited as I only had the experience and resources that RHFD could provide within the limited call volume and equipment provided.

Lastly and most importantly was financial stability. I was hired on a safer grant and was on the edge of losing my position. Luckily the community was so supportive of keeping both stations open and overwhelmingly passed the tax measure securing the positions and keeping the station open. While this kept me employed it still didn't address the issue of nearly 10 years of no pay raises prior to me leaving. Being a Firefighter in the Bay area is difficult when your pay is substantially less than many other departments. I understand there has been some pay raises since I have left which is great. Moving forward hopefully that continues to happen. Merging with Contra Costa Fire would eliminate the need for a Fire Chief position, administration, and other administrative costs as these are all duplicate costs that can be provided as part of Confire. It would provide financial stability to the members serving the community as part of a bigger entity. It would continue to provide outstanding service to the community while also enhancing resources they could provide. The current model is not sustainable and merging with Confire is not only a fiscally responsible decision but it is the best decision for both the community and the current members who continue to proudly serve Rodeo and Hercules.

I want to thank everyone tonight for allowing me a space to speak about my experiences with the RHFD. I hope that tonight you will take the time to really think about what is best to support the departments members and provide the best possible service to the citizens of Rodeo and Hercules. As I stated early I really enjoyed my time working for RHFD. It was a difficult decision to leave but the only option I had to further my career and better provide for my family. Unfortunately I was not the only one to have to make this decision but hopefully I will be the last.