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JOINT INFORMATIONAL HEARING

Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Management and
Assembly Select Committee on Natural Disaster Response, Recovery,
and Rebuilding

*Vision for Santa Barbara Recovery and Rebuild: Evaluating Where We Are, the
Long-Term Plan for Revitalizing Our Community, and Ensuring Continued
Effective Collaboration*

Thursday, July 12, 2018
Montecito Union School District
385 San Ysidro Rd.
Santa Barbara, CA

Background Paper

Introduction

In 2017 California experienced one of the worst wildfire seasons in its history as multiple wildfires devastated numerous counties in both Northern and Southern California. Both Santa Barbara and Ventura County were among those impacted with the eruption of the Thomas Fire on December 4, 2017. Advancing at a rate of an acre per second as it began and continuing its destruction over the course of 40 days, this fire burned more than 280,000 acres, damaged or destroyed more than 1,300 homes and structures, and resulted in the loss of two lives. The Thomas Fire now stands as the largest wildfire in California's history, and unfortunately, was

just the first in a trio of natural disasters that have impacted Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties over the past 6 months.

A little over a month after the Thomas Fire started, during the early hours of January 9, 2018, a quick and heavy rain hit the charred hillsides overlooking the Montecito community. These heavy rains caused an unprecedented flow of debris and boulders to rush down the hillside through the Montecito community to the ocean. The debris flow carried cars with it, leveled homes, buried the 101 Freeway, and claimed the lives of 23 Montecito residents, two whom are still missing.

Now, just six months later, the area above Goleta has become the most recent city in the county to be hit by a natural disaster with the breakout of the Holiday Fire on the night of July 6, 2018 (Just last Friday night). Although this fire was fully contained by July 11, it burned more than 100 acres, destroyed or damaged 31 structures, and forced 2,500 residents to be evacuated from their homes. The continuity of these natural disasters reflects what Governor Brown and other have termed as the “new normal”, with the combined impact of strong sundowners and Santa Ana winds, low humidity, and dramatic weather events due to climate change wreaking havoc on our natural environment. If this is in fact the new normal, our community must come together to combine our individual efforts towards one vision for rebuilding a more resilient infrastructure that is better able to withstand the forces of these wildfires, debris flows and other natural disasters.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to assemble key leaders from both the local and state level to update the community on their efforts in Santa Barbara and Sacramento to recover from these incidents, to minimize the impact of future disasters, and to drive forward the long-term rebuilding and revitalization of our community.

County of Santa Barbara Recovery Strategic Plan

In the wake of the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow, the County of Santa Barbara along with local stakeholders (local government, non-profit organizations, philanthropy, and community groups) adopted a Recovery Strategic Plan. This strategic plan is composed of a number of short, mid and long-term goals to implement the collective vision that the community has set for its recovery, as well as making it more resilient to future natural disasters.

The plan encompasses the following eight strategic areas:

1. Storm Preparation and Evacuation - Updating the county storm readiness plan, taking into account environmental changes and new data after the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow.
2. Long Term Flood Control Mitigation - Updating county mitigation plans for flood control, including looking at infrastructure modifications to debris basins, waterways, conveyance systems, alternate debris disposal sites, and purchase of property for flood control zones.
3. Private Property Re-building - Providing clear and consistent information and direction to the community regarding the rebuilding process, taking into consideration protection and preparation for potential future debris flows.
4. Debris on Private Property - Continuing community support and help through the development of a debris management plan.
5. Financial Impacts and Economic Recovery - Developing a plan to secure critical hazard mitigation project funding, as well as promoting the community's future economic prosperity.
6. Infrastructure Repair and Modifications - Restoring and improving the resilience of critical infrastructure systems and services that were damaged by the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow.
7. Natural and Cultural Resources - Continuing support for the protection, preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of community natural and cultural resources.
8. Community Engagement - Fostering the creation of systems and platforms for non-profit, philanthropy and community groups to address critical community needs.

As stakeholders continue to assess these goals, and with the recent development of the Holiday Fire in Goleta, this plan will require continued updating to assist communities impacted by the fires and debris flows, as well as continued preparation for future events.

State-Level Response to Fires and Debris Flow

Parallel to local efforts, area legislators Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson and Assemblymember Monique Limón have been proactive in introducing legislation and pushing the state to fund critical community needs in the wake of recent disasters. Their efforts have focused on post-disaster recovery, revision and expansion of state fire prevention methods, emergency notification systems, and modifications to state insurance law. The following bills introduced by

Senator Jackson and Assemblywoman Limon represent some of their work to date on these issues:

- SB 821 Emergency Notifications - (Author Senator Jackson and Principal Coauthor Assemblymember Limón)

SB 821 will authorize counties to automatically enroll residents into county-operated emergency notification systems while also providing the option for individual residents to who do not wish to receive alerts to opt-out from participating in their county's local warning system.

- SB 917 Insurance Coverage for Mudflows - (Author Senator Jackson)

SB 917 clarifies existing state insurance law by reiterating that property insurance policies shall cover the loss or damage resulting from a landslide, mudslide, debris flow, or other earth movement disaster if such event resulted from another covered peril covered under that insurance policy, such as a wildfire.

- SB 1260 Fire Prevention and Protection - (Author Senator Jackson)

SB 1260 is an omnibus fire prevention and forestry bill that improves the long-term health of California's forests as well as enhancing their wildfire resiliency. This bill, among other things, authorizes federal, state, and local agencies to collaborate on forest management, creates new opportunities for public and private land managers to mitigate wildfire risks, and enhances CalFire's role in identifying wildfire hazards while local governments plan for new housing and neighborhoods.

- AB 1877 Office of Emergency Services: Translation - (Author Assemblymember Limón and Coauthor Senator Jackson)

AB 1877 will require the Office of Emergency Services and the governing body of each political subdivision of California to provide translated versions of emergency communication materials to their constituents in the most commonly spoken language other than English.

- AB 1923 Consolidated Debris Removal Program - (Author Assemblymember Limón)

AB 1923 would (in collaboration with the Governor's Office, CAL-OES, and other state and local agencies) codify the consolidated debris removal program in statute and require insurers, only after homeowner consent, to participate if there is a declared emergency and if the appropriate government agency cites the health and safety of the community and/or natural resources as a basis for conducting the consolidated debris removal program.

- AB 1956 Fire Prevention Activities: Local Assistance Grant Program - (Author Assemblymember Limón)

AB 1956 creates a new fire prevention working group composed of representatives and stakeholders from state agencies, local government, academia, industry, and non-profit with experience and involved in state fire prevention. This bill tasks this working group with reviewing existing and identifying new fire prevention sources and methods.

- 2018-2019 State Budget

Senator Jackson and Assemblymember Limón sponsored the following items in this year's budget negotiations which directly impact rebuilding, disaster prevention, and recovery efforts in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties:

- \$12 million across two budget years to backfill property tax revenue losses incurred in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties due to the Thomas Fire and 1/9 Debris Flow.
- \$10.5 million across two budget years to backfill attendance related losses incurred by local school and community college districts in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties due to the Thomas Fire and Montecito Debris Flow.
- \$5.5 million to offset the local cost share associated with debris removal in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties as a result of the Thomas Fire and Montecito Debris Flow.
- \$10 million to fund Assembly Bill 1956 (*Limón*), which creates a robust year-round fire prevention local assistance grant program.
- \$160 million for long-term forest health and wildfire resiliency, including funding for fire prevention and forestry management programs in SB 1260 (*Jackson*).

Additional State-Level Responses

California's state agencies continue to invest heavily in programs that confront the heightened risk of wildfire following years of drought and the effects of climate change. The programs highlighted below represent some of those that are receiving new or increased support in the wake of the devastating 2017 Fire Season.

1. Cal OES: Strategic Prepositioning of Resources

The mission of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) is to protect the lives and properties of Californians by taking a proactive approach to the risks, threats, and vulnerabilities facing the state. With the ever-growing impact of wildfire in California, Cal OES has enhanced its strategic prepositioning critical fire resources throughout Southern California counties during times of heightened fire danger, such as when the National Weather Service issues a "Red Flag Warning." When the Holiday Fire broke out on July 6, the prepositioning of assets, including an OES Strike Team in the Santa Barbara region, was instrumental in providing local, state, and federal fire agencies and officials with resources to quickly address the fire during the initial attack phase. OES also quickly secured a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to ensure that vital resources were available to control the Holiday Fire. The prepositioning of fire assets at key

locations in the state will continue to prove critical support for vulnerable communities during the 2018 wildfire season and beyond.

2. Cal Fire: Renewed Management of State Forests

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) is the agency primarily responsible for protecting the lives and property of Californians from wildfire. Decades of aggressive fire suppression, coupled with drought and the effects of climate change, have dramatically increased the size and intensity of wildfires, and exposed millions of Californians to unhealthy air and smoke. To combat this threat, Cal Fire will undertake additional fuel reduction projects through the operation of six year-round prescribed fire crews and implementation of a forest health research and monitoring program. Cal Fire will also provide up to \$20 million in block grants to support regional implementation of landscape-level forest restoration projects that leverage non-state funding.

3. California Department of Insurance

The California Department of Insurance is the state's largest consumer protection agency, overseeing the more than 1,300 insurance companies and 410,000 agents, brokers, adjusters, and business entities operating throughout California. Apart from serving as the regulating body for insurance providers, the Department of Insurance also directly works with consumers, annually receiving more than 170,000 consumer assistance calls and investigating more than approximately 37,000 consumer complaints which are processed accordingly through one of its four bureaus of consumer services: consumer communications, claims, health, and rating and underwriting services. Following the Thomas Fire, the Montecito Debris Flow, and now the Holiday Fire in Goleta, the Department's Consumer Services Division met with residents affected by fire and flood damage at Local Assistance Centers to answer questions on coverage, offer tips to consumers, and provide information about potential scams often seen during and after a disaster.

Conclusion

This past year, California experienced the largest and most destructive wildfire season in the state's history. Nearly 9,000 wildfires ignited across all parts of the state, burning over a half-

million acres of land, destroying more than 10,800 structures, and claiming the lives of 70 people. Santa Barbara was among the most impacted communities in the state due not only to the Thomas Fire, but the subsequent events of the 1/9 Debris Flow and most recently the Holiday Fire. These series of events encompass what has been referred to as California's "new normal" – a year-round risk of substantial, devastating wildfires and related events. Despite this unsettling reality, California is moving forward at the local and state level to reduce these risks and mitigate their impact on our communities, economy, and environment. This hearing will provide the public with an overview of the work that is being done at the local and state level towards rebuilding in Santa Barbara, as well as an opportunity to hear how stakeholders are collaborating to envision a more disaster resilient community.