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The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
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Re: Disaster Relief: Urgent Action

Dear Governor Brown:

The 2017 wildfire season brought devastation to communities throughout California. Gubernatorial declared state of emergencies were issued for record-breaking fires in October and December for 13 counties in both southern and northern California. Then, while California was still recovering, it was struck with the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in our State's history – the Camp Fire – which took 85 lives, burned 153,336 acres and destroyed 18,804 structures. The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), which represents all 58 counties, has been a strong advocate for policy that would make California more resilient. Last year, CSAC took the lead on a number of disaster recovery and response efforts as well as proposed changes to wildfire liability, forest management practices, and emergency notification procedures. CSAC will continue to be the voice of impacted communities in the coming legislative session, especially in the areas of utility infrastructure and insurance liability. That said, counties have identified four items that need urgent action. These are: (1) extending the sunset of the California Disaster Assistance Act, which provides counties with desperately needed funding; (2) providing resources so that all counties can send wireless emergency alerts to their residents; (3) the funding and modernization of the 9-1-1 emergency system; and, (4) funding for the California 2-1-1 communication system.

I. The California Disaster Assistance Act

The California Disaster Assistance Act (Act) authorizes the Director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to administer a disaster assistance program that provides financial assistance from the State for costs incurred by local governments as a result of a disaster. According to Cal OES, this program reimburses up to 75 percent of the following eligible costs:

- Overtime and associated wage additive costs for emergency response personnel;
- Actual travel and per diem;
- Supplies, materials, and equipment;
- Repair, permanent restoration, and replacement costs for public facilities;
- The cost of basic engineering services when necessary for construction projects;

- Indirect and administrative costs (10% of total approved state share);
- Costs for work performed under interagency assistance agreements for which an eligible applicant is legally obligated to pay; and
- The local cost share required under federal public assistance programs.

Unfortunately, the Act will sunset on January 1, 2019, and the State will no longer have the authority to reimburse counties for these costs. At a time when California is recovering from the worst wildfire in its history we cannot emphasize enough the importance of extending this sunset so that our communities can continue to rebuild.

II. Wireless Emergency Alert

The development of effective emergency response strategies is essential to all healthy and safe communities. In the event of an emergency, the strategies and systems used become critical, and can and do save lives. The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) is a modernization and integration of the nation's alert and warning infrastructure. IPAWS provides federal, state, and local public safety officials with an effective way to alert and warn the public about serious emergencies. It uses the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio, and other public alerting systems from a single interface.

WEA is, perhaps, the most game changing and effective emergency alert system. WEA is a public safety system that allows customers who own certain wireless phones and other enabled mobile devices to receive geographically-targeted, text-like messages alerting them of imminent threats to safety in their area. Wireless companies volunteer to participate in WEA, which is the result of a unique public/private partnership between the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the wireless industry to enhance public safety. Alerts are broadcast to coverage areas that best approximate the zone of an emergency. Mobile devices in the alert zone will receive the alert, even if they are roaming or visiting from another state. Consumers do not need to sign up for this service, and there is no fee associated with receiving alerts. The alert received by the mobile device is similar to a text message but the phone vibrates with much more force than it ordinarily would, and makes it squawk loudly, alerting the user that the message is no ordinary one.

Last session, CSAC supported Senate Bill 833 (McGuire; 2018) that requires Cal OES to establish standardized guidelines and best practices for public alerts and warnings and the use of mass notification systems. The legislation additionally requires Cal OES to develop an alert and warning training that include, at minimum, information regarding the evaluation, purchase, and operation of WEA and EAS equipment and software. While Senate Bill 833 was an important first step, counties will need assistance to bring IPAWS,

which includes the WEA and EAS systems, on-line. As of 2014, only half of California cities and counties were an IPAWS alerting authority. (*The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System: Current Practices and Perceptions of California Jurisdictions*, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, September 2014.) Counties not participating in IPAWS need funding to acquire compatible software, as well as staff training and to coordination with outside agencies. Counties, especially those impacted by the fires, do not have the fiscal capacity to become an IPAWS alerting authority. CSAC strongly supports funding for counties to invest in tools, like WEA, that could save lives during an emergency.

III. Funding and Modernization of 9-1-1

In an emergency, nothing is more critical than for residents to be able to quickly connect with public safety agencies for assistance. Yet, in California we are still counting on an antiquated system prone to outages during disasters that is financially supported by an archaic funding formula.

When the existing 9-1-1 fee structure was established, Californians only had landlines since neither cell phones nor the concept of communicating primarily through text/data existed. Because these technological advancements, in recent years there has been a steady decrease in the revenues collected and deposited into the State Emergency Telephone Number Account (SETNA) that funds California's 9-1-1 system. This is not sustainable and is of significant concern in an era when 9-1-1 calls are on the rise. In 2017, more than 28 million calls were placed to 9-1-1 representing approximately 77,000 calls per day, an increase of nearly 30 percent since 2010. The current system is overtaxed and has an average of 15 network outages a month which equates to 255 hours a month that 9-1-1 was not working.

An updated, flat-rate fee structure will allow California to sustain the existing 9-1-1 system while building-out Next Generation 911. This new system will utilize digital rather than analog, offering additional paths for calls to reach operators if cables are damaged by a natural disaster. Modernizing California's outdated 9-1-1 funding formula is crucial to protecting our emergency call system while providing for the future NextGen 911. Given this, CSAC supports a flat-fee structure as proposed in Senate Bill 870 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review; 2018) and Assembly Bill 1836 (Committee on Budget; 2018).

IV. Funding for California 2-1-1

2-1-1 is a free information and referral service using rich data and access to live specialists, via phone, text messaging, or Web, to connect people to services in their community 24-hours a day, 7 days-a-week. 2-1-1 agencies serve 1.4 million people in California from of all income levels, languages and cultural backgrounds each year, and many more people over the Web. Currently, 2-1-1 agencies operate in 39 of California's

58 counties and services are available to 93% of Californians. While Senate Bill 1212 (Hueso; 2016) provided a mechanism to bring the remaining counties online, there is no ongoing funding for the agencies. Funding for 2-1-1 services is critical as they streamline both the social services provisions as well as disaster assistance. The gap in 2-1-1 services was especially significant in 2018 where the number of fire-related disasters sent many residents evacuating across county lines – these residents did not know how to reach out for support and information as they crossed into counties not currently covered by 2-1-1 service.

The system plays a critical role in providing information and support in times of disaster, such as evacuation, shelter, food, medical and recovery information. For example, the Butte-Glenn County 2-1-1 has extensive information for survivors of the Camp Fire including everything from evacuation notices, to links to housing, to an entire section dedicated to rumor control. In 2017, 2-1-1 agencies responded to 22 disasters within California, fielding a total of 35,943 calls for 7 storm-related events, 12 fire events, and 3 public health events. Directing disaster information calls to 2-1-1 agencies is of benefit to both public agencies and the residents of California as calls can be streamlined by providing the three-digit 2-1-1 number to residents to dial for outreach as opposed to multiple ten-digit phone numbers. They also have a 24-hour phone line available. Given the critical role that 2-1-1 plays in the time of disasters, CSAC supports funding for 2-1-1.

All disasters start and end in our local communities and require partnerships with all levels of government. Local governments must have access to the fiscal assistance necessary to not only tackle rebuilding their communities but also to ensure that they have a system in place to warn their constituents. We appreciate your careful consideration of this growing and undeniable need to protect lives, property and the prosperity of our state. Should you have any questions and/or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Darby Kernan, Deputy Executive Director of Legislation, at (916) 284-9872 or dkernan@counties.org.

Respectfully,



Graham Knaus
Executive Director