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Board of Supervisors Asks for Fire Funding Process Review

(Santa Ana, CA) — The Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to formally respond to a lawsuit filed by the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) that seeks court validation of its plan to redirect excess tax money that the Authority claims is unneeded for fire protection.

The Board voted 4-to-1, with Supervisor Todd Spitzer opposed, to file a formal response to OCFA's "validation lawsuit." Any challenges to the lawsuit must be submitted by Monday. The Fire Authority's plan was approved last month by a 2/3rds vote of its members, which include 23 cities and the County.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Shawn Nelson said the County action is intended to "put the brakes" on immediate implementation of the plan. He said the County, which has responsibility for assuring fire protection countywide, is concerned that the Fire Authority's plan rests upon an improper procedure for evaluating the allocation of fire-fighting costs and potential reimbursements.

"It's not a proper process for the members of the [Fire Authority] to decide for themselves how the tax rolls should be allocated," Nelson said. "We admit this is coming about late, but it's never too late to be smart."

The Orange County Fire Authority was created in 1995 with money from the County General Fund that was allocated for fire protection. The County determined amounts for cities based on estimates for what fire services would cost, which over time has led to a surplus. The Authority's proposal would redirect those unneeded tax dollars. Some cities also pay the Fire Authority for firefighting from general city funds.

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