

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS**

**Seventy-Eighth Session  
May 25, 2015**

The Committee on Government Affairs was called to order by Chairman John Ellison at 9:07 a.m. on Monday, May 25, 2015, in Room 4100 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at [www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/78th2015](http://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/78th2015). In addition, copies of the audio or video of the meeting may be purchased, for personal use only, through the Legislative Counsel Bureau's Publications Office (email: [publications@lcb.state.nv.us](mailto:publications@lcb.state.nv.us); telephone: 775-684-6835).

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Assemblyman John Ellison, Chairman  
Assemblyman John Moore, Vice Chairman  
Assemblyman Richard Carrillo  
Assemblywoman Victoria A. Dooling  
Assemblyman Edgar Flores  
Assemblywoman Amber Joiner  
Assemblyman Harvey J. Munford  
Assemblywoman Dina Neal  
Assemblywoman Shelly M. Shelton  
Assemblyman Stephen H. Silberkraus  
Assemblywoman Ellen B. Spiegel  
Assemblyman Lynn D. Stewart  
Assemblyman Jim Wheeler  
Assemblywoman Melissa Woodbury

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

None

**GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:**

Senator Ben Kieckhefer, Senate District No. 16

Minutes ID: 1325



**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Jered McDonald, Committee Policy Analyst  
Eileen O'Grady, Committee Counsel  
Erin Barlow, Committee Secretary  
Cheryl Williams, Committee Assistant

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Scott F. Gilles, Legislative Relations Program Manager, City of Reno  
Hillary L. Schieve, Mayor, City of Reno  
Andrew Clinger, City Manager, City of Reno  
Dave Cochran, Division Chief, Reno Fire Department, City of Reno  
Marsha Berkgler, Chairwoman, Washoe County Board of Commissioners  
John Slaughter, County Manager, Washoe County  
Charles Moore, Fire Chief, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and  
Sierra Fire Protection District  
Steve Driscoll, City Manager, City of Sparks  
Thomas G. Daly, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada  
Malachy Horan, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada  
Mike Troy, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada  
V.J. "Jerry" Gamroth, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada  
Dennis Jacobsen, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada  
Tom Clark, representing Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority  
Michael D. Brown, Fire Chief, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District  
Rusty McAllister, President, Professional Fire Fighters of Nevada

**Chairman Ellison:**

We have one bill today. There will not be any fighting, and it will be a very easy hearing. I am just joking. We will hear Senate Bill 185 (2nd Reprint).

**Senate Bill 185 (2nd Reprint): Makes temporary changes relating to fire and related emergency services in certain counties. (BDR 42-121)**

**Senator Ben Kieckhefer, Senate District No. 16:**

Assemblywoman Neal is laughing; she knows I only bring noncontroversial bills before you. I am here to present Senate Bill 185 (2nd Reprint), which is an attempt to put in place what I believe is a commonsense approach to fire protective services in Washoe County. I think it is one you will believe makes sense as well.

This bill was drafted to encourage the local governments in Washoe County to put life and safety above all other issues around fire protection. It seems like a basic concept. I would like to start by saying that I believe the elected leadership in Washoe County and the City of Reno share in that, as do the elected representatives in the City of Sparks. We have had significant turnover in the Washoe County Board of Commissioners and the City of Reno. I believe the leadership does believe in this, and I have faith that they will continue to push this.

When I talk to my constituents, they believe that when they call 911, a dispatcher will send the closest available emergency responder to them. I think that is a reasonable assumption. While it is true in Clark County and in rural counties, it is not true in Washoe County despite the fact that there are numerous fire departments. Vehicles are actually dispatched based on the political jurisdiction of the caller, and not the closest emergency responder. That means that during a home fire, the first engine dispatched could be miles away from the scene, despite the fact that an engine could be sitting in a fire house located literally down the street.

To illustrate the point, I refer you to the northwest corner of my district, which is a neighborhood called Hidden Valley. [Referred to the center of map [\(Exhibit C\)](#).] The majority of Hidden Valley is in unincorporated Washoe County, but part of it is in the City of Reno. There is a fire station in Hidden Valley that is controlled by the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD), which is the fire department under unincorporated Washoe County and controlled by the Washoe County Board of Commissioners. If you walk out the front door of that fire house and turn right, you enter the City of Reno in about 450 feet. There is a house there. But if that house catches fire, the fire station that is 450 feet away does not get dispatched because the house is in the wrong jurisdiction. Instead, the City of Reno will dispatch an engine from its Mira Loma Drive station, which is a few miles away. In regard to fire protection, two and a half miles is not that far away, but the idea of having an engine so close that is not dispatched does not make a lot of sense as property is burning and lives are potentially threatened. I believe that this is a problem that has been illustrated before, and it is one that we need to solve. I believe the fire service is primarily a local government function, and one I think local governments should fix.

Unfortunately, Washoe County government and the City of Reno government have been unable to assemble a system that puts life and property first. I am sure they will express many reasons why this has happened over the years. Much of it dates back to 2000, when the City of Reno and Washoe County decided to consolidate their firefighting services, and the City of Reno took over

the responsibility of running that consolidated department. During that period, the goal of this bill was briefly met, and the closest engine responded first. However, as the recession hit and local governments felt the financial pinch, the simmering disagreements over cost sharing, labor agreements, and other issues boiled over. The Washoe County Commission decided to deconsolidate the fire department and go back to the system we have now where the City of Reno Fire Department is responsible for protecting within the City of Reno, and the TMFPD is responsible for unincorporated Washoe County.

This came home for me a couple of years ago. On a Saturday after Thanksgiving in 2013, my in-laws' house caught fire in Hidden Valley. At the time, the Hidden Valley fire station I referred to earlier was staffed only with a rescue truck, which was not adequately staffed to fight a substantial structure fire. It was the first responding vehicle, but it took 19 minutes for a fire engine to arrive. During that time, there were multiple 911 calls from neighbors asking what was taking so long. What took so long was that the first engine came from nearly 11 miles away. A minute and a half later, more than 20 minutes after my mother-in-law first called 911, the second engine arrived from a station 12 miles away in Sun Valley. There were multiple City of Reno fire stations that could have responded more quickly if they had been dispatched. I cannot and will not try to second guess what would have happened under a different system, and in no way do I want my comments to reflect a lack of respect for the work firefighters did on the scene. They did incredible work. I respect what they do immensely. But in the end, the house was a total loss. I thank them for all their efforts. What gives me pause is not so much what happened to my family because no one was injured and all the animals got out, but I worry about the next family. I cannot go back and fix what happened to us and I do not expect to. But what happens if a fire starts at night when people are sleeping, or when my kids are sleeping at home, and the call is delayed from the very start? I think that is a very real possibility. That is why I am sitting here.

Between that incident in 2013 and now, there have been some discussions. There had been a revision to the mutual aid agreement that has been in place. But there is ongoing disagreement. I will say that this bill has driven Washoe County and the City of Reno to speak to each other more. They have another joint meeting tomorrow to discuss this issue. You will hear the ongoing debate today over what has prevented them from reaching an agreement. But I would like you to weigh those issues over whether they outweigh someone's life and safety.

Ultimately, the bill is one sentence of new statute. It requires the local governments in Washoe County to create a system where the closest emergency vehicle responds. That is it. It takes effect October 1 of this year. On the floor of the Senate I amended in a sunset date of June 30, 2017, as an incentive to keep both parties at the table knowing that if they enter an automatic aid agreement under mandate, it would expire at the end of the next biennium. They would have to justify to their constituents why they would be decreasing the level of fire protection. That is the bill in a nutshell.

**Chairman Ellison:**

This bill is not only fire services, but mutual aid for all emergency medical services (EMS). If someone is having a heart attack and there is a fire station across the street, why would someone from 16 miles away be sent? There could be a loss of life. Perhaps we could consider an amendment ([Exhibit D](#)) that has been presented. I met with the presenters this morning, and I want you to look at the amendment, if you can, to see if it is a friendly amendment, if you agree to it, or if you might have other language to propose.

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

I will take a look at that. I am neutral on the amendment ([Exhibit D](#)) currently. The EMS issue is a little more complicated in Washoe County because of the contract for EMS services rather than having them provided uniformly by the fire departments. I have thought about incorporating EMS services into this bill, but it is a little more complicated than it may appear upon first glance. There are various levels of training for emergency technicians and paramedics for TMFPD and the City of Reno. I figured we should try to take one step at a time, and address EMS at a later point.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I think that has to be addressed. The dispatchers should be able to immediately dispatch anyone who is qualified. I think it will all come down to dispatch and education. It seems to me that both parties definitely see the need, and want to come together.

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

I agree with that. I think they want to solve the problem. This has been a long-simmering problem, much of which has to do with political volatility between various elected members of the Washoe County Commission and Reno's City Council under previous leadership. I do not disagree about dispatch. Clark County has a good number of different fire departments in it, and a centralized dispatch that sends out personnel based on a GPS system. There is cost associated with that, which Washoe County has not spent yet. But it is in the works, and everyone recognizes that.

**Assemblywoman Neal:**

What have the revisions to the mutual aid agreement been? I am assuming they did not go far enough that you could accomplish your goals without bringing legislation. What are the costs for the crossover? One part is unincorporated, and another is the City of Reno. What are the cost differences, and what do you expect to see as an outcome?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

The fire departments will be able to explain this much better than I can. But one of the primary changes to the mutual aid agreement was changing the authority of who can call for mutual aid. I believe that previously it had to be a battalion chief, and they may have moved that authority down the hierarchy to allow for a faster call. I think that was the most important change. That was an improvement, and I think everyone recognized it as an improvement. That happened quickly after the incident that happened to my family. I applaud that effort to come together and make that change quickly. They agreed to it, and it was not controversial.

As for the costs, I would say that the bill is neutral about costs because they can be negotiated. This is an agreement that has to be entered into by the local governments themselves. If there is an issue over cost, that can be negotiated as part of their agreement. It is a local government issue that is paid with local tax dollars. While there will be costs if calls are running out to other jurisdictions that you do not have current service territory over, the bill is neutral on if the local government picks up that financial burden or if it can be negotiated on a reimbursement basis. Unincorporated Washoe County and the City of Reno Fire Department are funded very differently. There is a dedicated tax rate in unincorporated Washoe County that funds the TMFPD, and City of Reno funds its fire department out of their general fund. That is an issue that has been difficult to overcome when talking about full regionalization, which I am sure you will hear about from the local governments.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I am glad you mentioned that. I am looking at the fiscal notes from Washoe County, the City of Reno, and the City of Sparks. Washoe County has \$0, the City of Sparks has \$0, but the City of Reno has a large amount. I cannot see why two entities have \$0 and one entity does not. Maybe we can get some answers today.

**Assemblyman Wheeler:**

I may have missed this information, but my question is on the cost as well. The fiscal note aside, which is of whopping size for the City of Reno, there is always a cost in responding. Who ends up paying for that response? If it is

a city fire, and the county responds, who ends up actually paying? I do not see that addressed in the bill. I assume that would have to be done in the agreement, but I would like your take on it.

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

That is exactly right. The bill is silent on that subject because fire protection is ultimately a local government responsibility that is paid for with local government tax dollars. I did not want to wade into that issue. I felt that if the bill required them to come to an agreement, it would have to be just that: a negotiation. The bill is silent on cost. There is nothing that precludes a reimbursement agreement as part of this, if that is the agreement that the governments make. They could also try it for a year, see how many runs they actually make, and see what those costs actually are before they decide to do it. Maybe that is something they can already plan based on data they have. It is ultimately for them to decide. The bill is fairly heavy-handed, but I did not want it to be quite that heavy-handed.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

As this bill is currently written, does it address all emergency situations such as medical, rescue during severe weather, or other related events?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

It does not. My understanding is that there are emergency response plans in place that address some of those issues outside of general jurisdictional issues. I would allow the emergency managers to talk about that. I did not want to interrupt any well-thought-out and well-developed plans for broader emergency response in larger, significant events that occur.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

This bill identifies a potential financial impact to local government entities. In your opinion, what is the dollar value of that financial impact, and how would you reconcile the financial impact between entities?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

I believe the City of Reno is the only local government that submitted a fiscal note. It has been a while since I looked at it, but I believe it is \$1.8 million over the biennium. I would say that if one entity thinks there is a fiscal impact, there probably should be one on the other entity as well, since they will be responding to calls both ways. There seems to be some disagreement over that. The bill does not preclude reimbursement agreements if they were to be incorporated

into the language of the agreement. But that is not totally necessary. Since there are local tax dollars being allocated, it would be up to the local governments to determine how that split is done. But I believe the only fiscal note that has been prepared is by the City of Reno.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

Was there ever any mention of cost sharing, perhaps?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

I believe that the bill was intended to force these two governments to come together to reach an agreement. That agreement could be to share or not share costs. But it would be up to them.

**Assemblywoman Shelton:**

From your testimony, I was getting the impression that these two entities are willing to work together. But from what you just said, I think maybe they are not willing to come together, and that is why this bill is here. At the beginning, I thought that if they are willing to work together, why does the state need to step in?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

I do not feel entirely comfortable with the state telling local governments how to do their fire service. I understand your hesitation about that. But this has been a long-standing disagreement between the two governments. Those two governments are now under newly elected leadership. As I said before, I have faith in Chairwoman Berkbigler and Mayor Schieve to address this issue. I believe their intentions are in the right place. But it has been a decent amount of time since I raised this issue to a level where I gave fair warning to everyone that I was going to bring a bill on this subject if it was not addressed. While I believe their intentions are good, I think a little pressure can sometimes help.

**Assemblywoman Shelton:**

Did you see the amendment ([Exhibit D](#)) that was proposed? Is it a friendly amendment?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

I did. I am neutral on the amendment at this time. I have not had a chance to really look at it in detail and determine its effect on the ongoing talks. I will say that the City of Reno and Washoe County do have a joint meeting scheduled on May 26, 2015 to discuss this very issue. The entire point of the bill is to try to bring them together. I would defer to those two local governments to come back and give their input following the meeting before I give an opinion on this.



**Assemblywoman Joiner:**

My understanding is also that the mutual aid agreements have changed slightly, and that was one of my main questions. My understanding of the mutual aid that we have right now is that it just takes a phone call, and the other trucks would be dispatched and that there is currently no shared dispatch for all the entities in the county. How do you envision this being practically implemented on October 1, in a way that will work that is better than our current agreement? I understand that many of the examples were cases where the call was not made fast enough for mutual aid. The changes that have been made to mutual aid seem to need to be ones that make it an effective regional structure for now, until the conversations can continue. I understand that the practical implementation might need some technical changes. Who would carry the costs of that?

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

Mutual aid relies on an individual deciding to call for it. Ultimately, I think that recognizing that minutes can matter in emergencies related to life means that a system that errs on the side of caution is bad. The improvements to the mutual aid agreement have been a significant step in the right direction, but they do not address the root cause of the problem. When it comes to dispatch, my understanding is that the Washoe County dispatch system is centrally located right now, and calls are routed through the same call intake procedure. Then they are sent to either the TMFPD dispatch, or the City of Reno dispatch based on jurisdiction, but they are located in the same facility. I cannot talk about the technicalities of correcting that system but, ultimately, if there are technical issues that need to be addressed with information technology infrastructure, that is part of the cost of doing the business of fire protection. It would be incumbent upon local governments to fund that.

**Chairman Ellison:**

We also need to consider the City of Sparks in this discussion. We need to make sure Sparks has a voice in this. Senator, I do not know if you have ever seen a picture of fire trucks lined up across the street from a house that is burning down. Because their entities could not come to an interlocal agreement, while the family was waiting for fire trucks to show up from a different district, their house was burning down and the fire personnel were not allowed to cross their boundary. It goes to show that someone forgot who we serve. It was a shocker. You know the firefighters wanted to help, but politics got in the way and they could not. The family ended up losing everything in that house. Thank God there was no one in it. I have had that picture for years, because I was the police commissioner for ten years. That picture always stuck in my mind.

**Assemblywoman Spiegel:**

A big concern I have relates to what I understand about the disparity in the sizes of the crews that are sent out from different jurisdictions. I believe some have four-person crews and some have two-person crews. I will give you a hypothetical situation, and then a question related to it. Say there is an incident in an area that is primarily served by a two-person crew, but the nearest station has a four-person crew, so the four-person crew is dispatched. At the same time nearby, a house which would normally be served by the four-person crew only has the two-person crew respond and there is considerable loss of property or maybe life because of the considerable disparity in the different crews that responded. If the people who live in the jurisdiction that paid for a four-person crew gets served by the two-person crew because of the state's mandate, does that increase civil liability for the state? Does that also increase liability for the entities themselves? I know that if I had paid for a four-person crew and lost anything because I was served by a two-person crew, I would be suing someone.

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

The City of Reno has four-person crews, and the TMFPD has three-person crews. The vast majority of the country, including Clark County, has three-person crews. I do not think there are any two-person crews in Washoe County; I have never heard of that as an issue. The size of the crews and the engines is still an issue between Washoe County and City of Reno. Ironically, in the more urban area of the City of Reno, it seems there should be a faster response time between stations for mutual engines to arrive from disparate points to a central location. If you had three-person crews in Reno, it would be more likely that you would get two engines responding and have six people on the scene. As I understand, there needs to be two people going in and two people outside to enter a structure. But in the outer areas, it would make more sense to have four-person crews because it would take longer to get another there. It seems that what is appropriate response time is reversed. But that is beside the point. The majority of the nation believes a three-person crew is the appropriate crew size for a fire engine. The issue of having a three-person crew respond to a fire is not a big issue for me.

**Chairman Ellison:**

Are there any other questions? [There were none.]

**Senator Kieckhefer:**

Chairman Ellison, you did mention the City of Sparks. I will say that Sparks does have automatic aid agreements in place with the City of Reno and Washoe County. They have always done their own thing in this area, and my

intent was not to drag them into a larger issue. But I think as the conversation happens at a regional level, their voice is critically important, and we need to continue to listen to the City of Sparks as well.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I agree. I think that no one is opposed to the idea of this bill. I think we need to get into this bill and tweak a few things. It is not about jurisdiction, it is about the people out there. Let us address the amendment ([Exhibit D](#)), and then open up the discussion. There are a lot of concerns, and I think a lot of them could be addressed with the amendment. I met with those who wrote the amendment last week and again today.

**Scott F. Gilles, Legislative Relations Program Manager, City of Reno:**

Per the Chairman's request, I will take the Committee through the amendment we have proposed. We believe this amendment satisfies the sponsor's concerns, the county's desire to have the automatic aid provision still included, and it is a compromise for us because it includes some language that keeps the discussion going in a specific scheduled process.

Section 1 of the bill has not been changed. We have not touched the automatic aid provisions. But section 2 requires the entities that are subject to section 1 to negotiate the terms of an automatic aid agreement. Some of the terms include cost reimbursement, which has been discussed here today, areas of coverage that the local governments would want the automatic aid provision to relate to, and any other issues identified by the entity. The structure of this amendment is that section 2 would become effective upon passage of the bill so parties could immediately jump into negotiations. Section 1, which is the automatic aid provision, would still be effective October 1, 2015, so there would be a three-to four-month timeline for the parties to sit and work out the automatic aid provisions in section 1.

Sections 3 through 7 create a parallel track, where parties work to ultimately come to an agreement on an effective, comprehensive emergency and fire protection service for all the residents in Washoe County. This would be something more like the consolidation we talked about earlier. It would include automatic aid, and hopefully include something that would address the dispatch issue that is not addressed in the current form of this bill. Section 3 delineates that the Reno Fire Department, Sparks Fire Department, TMFPD, Sierra Fire Protection District (SFPD), and any other entities subject to the provisions of section 1 shall work together to determine and implement the most effective, organized, and comprehensive emergency fire protection services for all the residents of Washoe County. Section 4 says that those entities must create a task force that will meet monthly to discuss this issue. Section 5 then

requires local government boards and councils to meet publicly and jointly once every three months to get feedback from the task force, discuss the issue of the comprehensive agreement, and ultimately come to a resolution that works for everyone that satisfies the sponsor's and local governments' concerns, as well as the concerns of the citizens who want the best fire protection service in their county.

Section 6 is where the amendment attempts to hold the local governments' feet to the fire. It would require quarterly reports to the Legislative Commission about the status of those discussions, as well as any progress made. Section 7 hopefully never comes into play, but says that if the local governments and other entities cannot come to an agreement by December 31, 2016, they must come back to this body in 2017 and report their inability to come to an agreement. At that point, it would be the 2017 Nevada Legislature making decisions for the local government, which is something I do not believe any of the local governments want. This amendment is structured so that we should never get to that point. It allows the parties to work on parallel tracks while the automatic aid agreement is in place for a two-year period, with a sunset. It allows local governments to work on these issues and get them resolved, hopefully before that two-year period ends. Once the comprehensive agreement is reached, the rest of these provisions become moot and we do not have to come back to the Legislature to explain ourselves.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I think the amendment is a great thing. You are saying that they would report to the Interim Finance Committee every three months?

**Scott Gilles:**

Correct.

**Chairman Ellison:**

That is important, because it is a hammer in the toolbox. This is not something that has never been done. When we had that fire two years ago, every fire department, volunteer, and available truck was out there fighting the fires between here and Reno, trying to save those houses. It is not like we cannot cooperate. I think we need to tighten this up so that someone is first in response, and then jurisdiction could take over. But I think they must be closer, which is what the Senator is trying to do.

**Hillary L. Schieve, Mayor, City of Reno:**

We are not here to point fingers, but I do want to give you the history of how we ended up here in this situation. I am confident that Commissioner Marsha Berkgigler and I can work this out. Because of the new change in leadership, I am confident we can do it. I have already called several meetings regarding this issue. It is something near and dear to my heart. I do want to stress that this is not about pointing fingers, but I would like to give you some background. It is very unfortunate. I would like to show two videos that can give you some background.

[The videos ([Exhibit E](#)) were viewed by the Committee.]

**Assemblyman Stewart:**

In the amendment, you mentioned other entities besides the Sierra Fire Protection District, Reno Fire Department, and TMFPD. Are there other entities, or is this written for the future where others might be created?

**Andrew Clinger, City Manager, City of Reno:**

There are other jurisdictions that would be impacted by this, such as the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority or North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District. Those are the ones that I am aware of.

**Assemblyman Stewart:**

I believe that in the conversation we mentioned that they would report to the Interim Finance Committee. But I think they are reporting to the Legislative Commission.

**Andrew Clinger:**

Yes, it is the Legislative Commission.

**Assemblywoman Neal:**

We are near the end of the session, and Senate Bill 29 passed through both houses. What I am hearing as backstory is that the County and the City could not communicate well enough to achieve this without coming to the Legislature. So in matters of local concern, how would you have worked this out if the County had the capacity to determine what was an issue for them that may not have been an issue for you? How would that have been worked out? Those were ultimately the issues and problems that we felt were not going to be affected.

**Hillary Schieve:**

I will be having special meetings every single week. One thing I am very proud of is that Reno has a plan to open all our fire stations and provide outstanding service to the County without raising taxes. We do have a plan. When you are sitting in a committee, I personally know that it can be frustrating because everyone is fighting, but no one has a plan or process in place. But I also understand that this is truly about compromise. Both sides do not walk away perfectly happy. We continue to hold talks, and I hope we can get moving.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I appreciate that. I think that you are on the right track in trying to reach out with the olive branch. I am pretty happy with the rural counties because in Elko, we have had an interlocal agreement for years. The cities and the counties out there have worked quite well together. There are only so many resources, and you must work together.

**Hillary Schieve:**

There are a few points that I would like to make. I would first like to thank Senator Kieckhefer for bringing attention to this issue. I absolutely respect, understand, and applaud his motivation in sponsoring this legislation. Believe me when I tell you that my first and highest priority is to provide the best fire protection possible for all the City of Reno and Washoe County residents.

Currently, City of Reno residents have first-class fire protection service. The response times within the city are excellent, and we currently have existing mutual aid agreements with Washoe County and provide existing automatic aid to the City of Sparks. The City of Reno wants to take this assistance even further to ensure regional neighbors receive all the help they can get to protect their citizens and property.

Many are asking, How did we get here? Three years ago, Washoe County voted to deconsolidate because of political infighting. At that time, the City of Reno was vehemently opposed to deconsolidation knowing this would not be without serious consequences to its citizens. It was always a huge fear that someone would die or structures would be lost due to the "fire divorce." Unfortunately, when that divorce occurred, Washoe County citizens paid higher taxes and received less service.

In the Hidden Valley event, it is even more bothersome that a County fire station is located only a couple minutes away. Due to the County's decision to deconsolidate and their lack of resources, the County's fire crew showed up with only a rescue truck and two men. Once on scene, the County called for more backup that was 15 minutes away. During this time, the City of Reno

was not called upon by the County for more than 28 minutes, leaving one to only believe that pride got in the way and showed the grave danger of the decision to deconsolidate. Even more of a problem is that if S.B. 185 (R2) had been in place, this would not have changed the outcome, since the closest station did respond.

This only shows the County's unfortunate state of weakening resources. The City of Reno has always responded to the County's requests for service. It is with great sadness that lives and property will only continue to be lost due to deconsolidation and short-term solutions.

I commend Senator Kieckhefer on his efforts to take a step in the right direction. He has always stated that his efforts were nothing more than to get both sides to the table. I am pleased to announce that these conversations were taking shape once newly elected officials took office, but with extreme disappointment that the conversations have not materialized because this bill disincentivizes the County to come to the table. Even the County admits that consolidation is the best service to the citizens. There have been countless separate studies done on this issue, and the final studies commissioned by the County have all concluded that consolidation will save lives and money. But these studies have done nothing more than cost up to six figures and result in tireless talks. But they all conclude the same outcome: consolidation.

It sounds simple that the closest engine should respond, and no one would disagree. Unfortunately S.B. 185 (R2) is a Band-Aid approach, and leaves the City of Reno and Washoe County vulnerable to tragic events under this bill. Some serious concerns come into question under S.B. 185 (R2), such as, when the City of Reno responds to Washoe County calls, our coverage and response times could possibly double and triple in some areas of Reno. If the County calls for assistance with excessive delay times, what will be the motivation to call sooner? This bill requires response to structure fires, but many calls are medical. This leaves a huge gap for citizens who need assistance in other emergency events.

Fire station placement by the County is concerning when they have built stations on top of Reno fire stations. This shows complete redundancy concerning financial spending. The City of Reno supports the conversation from this bill but believes it should go much further so that both parties can provide only their best service. As the Mayor of Reno, it is my job to protect my citizens, so I will continue to vow to call special council meetings in hopes that the County will help us make consolidation a reality for everyone. This should be about priorities, not about pride, or many more City and County residents will end up paying the ultimate price. I would not come here today

without solutions, and the City of Reno is proud to say that we have a plan that will open our stations and provide service to the County without raising taxes. I ask that you please consider helping both parties avoid a Band-Aid approach, which has already proven to be deadly and detrimental. I want to reiterate that the City of Reno residents have first-class fire service, but the City of Reno wants to make sure this assistance goes much further to ensure our regional neighbors get all the help they can to protect their citizens and property. I know firsthand the tragedy of fire, and refuse to let people die because we allowed pride over priority. This only jeopardizes Reno and Washoe County residents left to pay the ultimate price.

**Dave Cochran, Division Chief, Reno Fire Department, City of Reno:**

As Mayor Schieve has stated, Reno does not have a fire protection issue. We provide excellent service to the citizens of Reno. Automatic aid is an attempt to provide assistance to the unincorporated areas of Washoe County. We support that. This bill does not address that problem. This bill creates countywide response commitment, which creates a fiscal impact. We are not here to talk about money issues, but they are there. It is not just money, it is service and safety. The simple mandate of this bill is untethered to any structure that could provide equitable and safe implementation of the plan. Under this bill, neighboring agencies will be providing assistance without proper backfill or coverage of the areas they will be abandoning. For example, in the City of Reno, our Engine 3 was responding in the Caughlin Ranch area, and Engine 12 was responding in Virginia Highlands—two areas underserved by the County. Those engines would leave vast, very busy districts without fire protection. District 3 has over 250 calls a year, which is what they ran in 2014. That is more than half of what the entire County department runs by itself. Is it fair, as Assemblywoman Spiegel raised, to submit those citizens to the risk of having their jurisdiction unprotected? They are paying for those four-person crews and expecting that protection. Reno is committed to providing that, but also to assisting our neighbors. A more stark example is at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport. They have a single crew. They are also subject to the mandates of this bill. If that single crew responds somewhere off the airport, the airport is unprotected. That crew will have to choose between following the law and leaving their jurisdiction completely unprotected.

There are other impacts that are not just fiscal. If you look at that map ([Exhibit F](#)), the black dot in the lower right represents a Washoe County station. Just below that is a Division of Forestry (NDF), State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources station. That station would be closer to



anything farther south of that County station. Under S.B. 185 (R2), that station would be mandated to respond. The problem is that NDF is not equipped, trained, or staffed to respond to a structure fire. There are cost and safety issues there.

Finally, we recently received an Insurance Services Office rating of 2. I think you are all aware that that very high rating confers a substantial financial benefit on our citizens. If the City of Reno is committed without guidance or direction to respond to Washoe County's 6,500 square miles, that rating is at risk. That is a direct financial impact to every citizen of Reno.

Some questions were asked about dispatch. Right now, we do not have a common central dispatch. How would we get the closest crew apparatus working? The technology exists, but we do not have it in place in Washoe County. What that would devolve into is mutual aid, which we have in place. We do not have the ability to determine what the closest rig is. We can determine what the closest station is, but that does not mean anyone is in that station or if a rig that is already out is closest to a fire. Reno fully complies with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 standard, which addresses fire response criteria, response times, and staffing criteria. Reno is the only department in the area that has four-person crews. That means on every fire Reno responds to, we can make an aggressive interior attack. No other agency in Washoe County can provide that service. There are training, money, and safety issues involved in all aspects of this. I would like to conclude by reiterating what Mayor Schieve said. We have proposed an amendment that establishes a process to get to regionalization. In fact, we are taking the first step in that process tomorrow in the joint meeting between the City and the County. We ask you to support us.

**Assemblywoman Shelton:**

They gave an example about Hidden Valley. I am from Las Vegas, so I am not familiar with the area. Can you show me where Hidden Valley is on the map ([Exhibit F](#)), where the fire department that responded is, and where the department that was closest is?

[Scott Gilles pointed to the area near the black circle symbol indicating a Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District Station in the center right of ([Exhibit F](#)).]

**Dave Cochran:**

Scott is pointing to the Hidden Valley area. To clarify, the closest apparatus did respond. It is that black dot, a County station. It did respond. The red station nearby is a City of Reno station. In a regionalized model, those would all be

part of the response training and considered for the response training. With an automatic aid model, a call goes to the closest engine. That was the County's engine.

**Chairman Ellison:**

Are there any other comments? [There were none.] The reason I got off track was to get the amendment in the discussion.

**Scott Gilles:**

If this amendment ([Exhibit D](#)) was included in the legislation, we believe we would be able to remove our fiscal note.

**Chairman Ellison:**

That would be a big help. You are going to meet this week, and we are going to hold this bill for as long as we can so both parties can have their meetings. Now I will open the hearing for those who are in favor of S.B. 185 (R2). I would appreciate if testifiers would also talk about the proposed amendment.

**Marsha Berkbigler, Chairman, Washoe County Board of Commissioners:**

We are in full support of Senator Kieckhefer's bill in its current form. Commissioner Bob Lucey and I are the only commissioners who have had the opportunity to look at the amendment. We did not review it until yesterday, so our commissioners have not had a chance to look at it. I cannot state if we are in support of it or not. I can say that public safety is high on my priority list also. I think that is the case for any elected official. Our job is to make sure we are doing what we can to protect the citizens in our community. I am strong on public safety, as is the Mayor. That is why my biggest issue is dispatch. It is clearly broken in Washoe County and needs to be fixed. We are working on that. We have had a number of meetings. Last week, the Mayor and I, along with staff members, met with the fire departments. We are moving on that. Washoe County has the ability to get the system up and running. The fire chief next to me can tell you about that. We are in the process of putting that together and working with other entities in our community.

Something that is perhaps different about Washoe County versus other counties in Nevada is that we have an entity called Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority (REMSA). That is a nonprofit entity that provides ambulance services. They have a contract through the Washoe County Health District that allows them to be the only transport of patients to the hospital. That has been in place for a long time and is not something we could change immediately.

We are working on making changes to that particular program also. I think it is also important that Washoe County's fire services—TMFPD and SFPD—are financially stable. They have replaced many fire trucks, which we have paid cash for.

I was not elected when the "fire divorce" was happening. We have been improving these fire services in the past four years. Washoe County's fire services and City of Reno Fire Department were never merged. They were two separate fire services that worked under an interlocal agreement. That is a different entity than a merger. Technically, they were still operating separately. Washoe County has a board of fire commissioners for the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and the Sierra Fire Protection District. We still meet as those two entities. It is my understanding that when this "fire divorce" took place, it was largely because of finances, though the Mayor was correct in saying that there was political fighting. Washoe County felt that it could no longer afford to stay in the fire department as it was set up. The Washoe County Commissioners made the decision to go back to being an independent fire department, and that is what they did. The County did adjust tax rates to make sure TMFPD and SFPD residents who were served by those entities paid the same tax rate. But there was not a huge tax increase or lack of service. Our fire department is very strong and does a good job.

I am not easily offended, but I am sensitive to other entities making that kind of statement about our fire departments. The Washoe County Commission set up a blue ribbon fire study with representation from citizens in the community, and it was managed by a national entity that manages those types of fire studies. That study said there is a process we need to go through to get to ultimate regional fire services. It said that the first step of that is mutual aid. I think that is what this bill is offering. It is the chance for us all to provide mutual aid. Our first meeting is tomorrow. Washoe County has made no bones about the fact it wanted to meet with the City of Reno. We have moved forward in that process at every opportunity. The meeting is set for tomorrow afternoon at 1:30, where we will discuss the issues. I hope we will be able to talk about this amendment then and get back to you.

**John Slaughter, County Manager, Washoe County:**

I wanted to talk about the context of the joint meeting tomorrow. As Ms. Berkbigler mentioned, the full Washoe County Board of Commissioners has not seen the amendment. I am hoping that in the joint meeting tomorrow, we can review it. The meeting will begin with a discussion reviewing both entities' current operations, governance, funding, and the capabilities of those

fire services. I think you have heard a lack of understanding about each other's capabilities throughout this discussion. We wanted to start that discussion with the joint meeting tomorrow. We will also be talking about automatic aid and regionalization. We will be reviewing the proposed amendment in that context.

**Charles Moore, Fire Chief, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and Sierra Fire Protection District:**

I think you would agree that the reason government was formed was for the common defense of the people. On a local basis, that is police and fire protection. Over the past years, automatic aid has existed between many jurisdictions, not just the local municipal and county fire departments, but with federal and state partners, and even partners in California. The only automatic aid that does not exist is between TMFPD and the City of Reno. We have automatic aid with the City of Sparks. On a daily basis, we provide automatic aid to one another, and it is not controversial. We do not keep track or score of how many times we respond for the other. We just provide the response to the person who needs it from the truck that is closest. That is what this bill is about, and we wholeheartedly support that.

It is true that there are some technological changes that need to happen in order to get the closest fire truck dispatched. But those have largely been overcome with software upgrades. There are just a few switches to flip and trainings for dispatchers. I believe the technological impediments to doing this will be resolved. The way this will work for a dispatcher is that they will see the location of every fire truck, police officer, and ambulance on a screen. The software will automatically select the unit closest to the emergency.

There are some factual errors in the previous presentation I would like to correct. This was never a consolidated fire department; this was simply a contract for service. In 2007, when the real estate bubble burst and the recession followed, we saw local government revenues plummet. In our jurisdiction, we saw revenues fall 25 percent. You cannot continue to provide service to citizens with that revenue drop without making fundamental changes to how you operate. It was absolutely necessary to continue service, but we could not do so under the cost structure and cost of labor we had in the interlocal agreement with the City of Reno. Unfortunately, negotiations failed. The Washoe County Board of Commissioners had to take a stand for its own separate department so that the service level was commensurate with the risk, money, expenditures, and revenues we had to pay for that service. Since July 1, 2012, when we started TMFPD, we have had every one of our fire stations staffed 100 percent of the time. We have instituted advanced life support (ALS) paramedic service in every one of our fire trucks. We have saved more lives with ALS intervention and ALS therapies than we would have with

structure response. Clearly, our business is in emergency medical—66 percent of our calls are acute and traumatic medical emergencies. We have brought people back from cardiac arrest. Those people are alive today because we decided to increase ALS.

I realize that this bill is about fire services, but our strategy was based on the medical emergencies—where our business is. Structure fires are only 0.5 percent of our total response. Fires that require the "two in, two out" strategy are less than 0.25 percent. In all the structure fires in 2014, the total value was about \$1 million. Our average loss was about \$9,000 in the structures that were affected. How can anyone say we are not an effective fire service? We are. The data for our fire department shows that we are clearly providing the right service for the right reasons and are financially sustainable. We have a projected ending fund balance for next year of 25 percent. That is a financially stable fire department. We can meet the needs of our constituents in a cost-effective manner.

I would like to address the station locations. We have not built fire stations overlapping City stations. Over the last decade, the City of Reno annexed areas where our fire stations were located. Because of the annexations, some of our fire stations are within City boundaries. It is clear that we have some emergencies in the City of Reno that could be steps away from the front door of our fire stations. We like to talk about Senator Kieckhefer's emergency. That was indeed a bad fire. But the City of Reno has had structure fires a few feet from our stations. We were not called. In January 2015, a man suffered a cardiac arrest 50 feet from one of our fire stations. We were not called. We need to get automatic aid throughout the jurisdiction. We want to do that. We have offered automatic aid to the City of Reno three times. They have answered no. If it takes legislation to make this happen, I am asking you to pass this.

**Chairman Ellison:**

That is why I brought up mutual aid at the beginning. There is fire response, but EMS should also be part of the discussion. If you are close by someone who is in cardiac arrest, you could be able to at least stabilize that person until the others get there. The key to this is dispatch. Looking at your map ([Exhibit F](#)), it seems like you have everything there. You know where the closest stations are. It is not a jurisdictional issue, but a training issue. We need to make sure everyone is on the same page.

**Assemblyman Flores:**

I understand that this is something that would typically be taken care of at the local level. But since we are here, someone must have thought that we needed to intervene because parties were not talking to each other. I understand that the City of Reno has been having monthly meetings. I want to know if Washoe County has been going, and what types of discussions you have been having. If you have not been going, I would like to know why. How are we going to ensure that this relationship will work in the future? That is why we are here.

[Assemblyman Moore assumed the Chair.]

**Marsha Berkbigler:**

The problematic relationship between the City and County developed long before the Mayor and I were elected. We have a totally new City Council and Washoe County Commission, and new staff in both. I think the Mayor and I are strong leaders who are serious about the safety issue. We want to work together, and I think you will see that we do work together. I think there is a sense of lack of trust because of past history, and I understand that. I think that is why we are here. I believe Reno has had two separate fire meetings, and Washoe County leadership has been at them. Commissioner Lucey and I were at the first one, and I believe Mr. Clinger, Commissioner Lucey, and Chief Moore were at the second one. We have been going to those meetings. Our purpose in going to them was not to interfere with their process; it was to be there if they had questions and to listen to what they had to say. I think tomorrow is the first real meeting between us. I appreciate that the City of Reno has a plan. I hope the Washoe County Commission will have the chance to look at it and discuss it. Something about the overall plan that I think we all agree on is that we are not all going to get everything we want. The Mayor said that earlier. But we do know that we have to reach an agreement. I believe the Washoe County Commission is fully committed to working on this and working with the City of Reno to resolve any remaining legacy problems that might have been there.

**Assemblywoman Dooling:**

I understand both sides. But all of us here represent the people. The people do not know about your issues and do not really care about them. The people really want this solved. How many meetings do you think it will take for you to come to a conclusion and get this resolved?

**Marsha Berkgigler:**

I wish I could say. I have no idea how many meetings it will take. I personally have had the chance to review the City of Reno's proposal, and have some questions on it that I would like to discuss. I do not know what the positions of the other commissioners are. I can tell you that the Mayor and I are working as a team. We have agreed that we are going to fix this.

[Assemblyman Ellison reassumed the Chair.]

**Hillary Schieve:**

I agree with you. I do not want to continue to have meeting after meeting. Assemblywoman Dooling, you are exactly right. The people do not care. We represent the public, and need to be representing them in their best interests. They do not care about the fighting or these meetings. We have had expensive studies. What I understand from my fire experts is that this has been talked about so much, that the fix is relatively easy. We should not be continuing these talks. We need to put our money where our mouth is.

**Assemblywoman Dooling:**

Chief Moore, how difficult would it be to implement this system?

**Charles Moore:**

Not difficult at all. There just needs to be a willingness to sit down and figure it out. It is not hard technologically or from a firefighting perspective. We have studied what the number of responses will be from each of us. It is not excessive. This is easy to do.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

Chief Moore, when TMFPD and the City of Reno Fire Department were a consolidated fire department, was there a need for an automatic aid agreement? Is there any specific agreement we can review?

**Charles Moore:**

There was an automatic aid agreement with SFPD and the City of Reno, and that was exercised a lot. Under the terms of the contract for service, Reno operated the fire service for TMFPD. In that context, there was no automatic aid agreement because there was a contract for service instead. But there was an automatic aid agreement prior to the contract for service in 2000.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

What is the response reliability rate for the volunteer stations? Does this bill improve the service delivery for volunteer stations?

**Charles Moore:**

It is no one's intent that volunteer resources would respond. It takes a long time for them to mobilize. I think it would be unreasonable to expect volunteer resources to respond for the City of Reno or Sparks, or any of our partners. We use volunteers as a force multiplier in peak activity, such as lightning storms. We do not necessarily use them as immediate staff. I would not be in favor of expecting volunteers to respond under this law. It is clear to me that the intent is that a career station responds.

**Assemblywoman Joiner:**

When listening to your presentation, Chief Moore, I think I heard you say that a regional solution is needed, and that a majority of your calls are medical. It seems that the amendment is actually the only language that talks about medical response. The current form of the bill only relates to fire. I gathered that it could be a good idea to include medical discussion, and have a more regional approach. What is your position on the amendment?

**Charles Moore:**

Until the Washoe County Board of Fire Commissioners has a chance to study the amendment, I cannot offer comments. I do not want to get ahead of my board until they have looked at the amendment.

**Assemblywoman Neal:**

I looked at your meeting minutes all the way back to about September 2012. Special meetings were held, and the agenda item was the discussion of possible action extension of mutual and automatic aid agreements between the City of Reno, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, and the Sierra Fire Protection District all the way back to September 10, 2012. Now I am listening to you and trying to understand. You knew it was a problem. I read specific public comments saying the deconsolidation was a problem, and there was a series of fires and incidents that came up and made people question whether or not deconsolidation was helpful or effective. I am trying to understand what the wake-up call was that made you think you ought to sit down and have a conversation to come to an agreement. Was it because Senator Kieckhefer said he was tired of it and would bring a bill, or did you finally think maybe it was a serious problem and you ought to talk?

**John Slaughter:**

During discussions when we were coming out of the interlocal agreement that TMFPD had with the City of Reno, the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Washoe County Board of Commissioners continued to recognize that regionalization of fire was the ultimate answer throughout the discussion. The interlocal agreement from the early 2000s that ended in 2012 included



a preamble that said it was the first step toward regionalization. But the entities never took the next step of actually talking seriously. I think we just got comfortable with the agreement we had. If not for the recession and its fiscal impact, we may still have been in that agreement. Hopefully, we will begin that discussion. Since 2012, the Washoe County Board of Commissioners, as Chief Moore has said, has made offers to the City of Reno for automatic aid. The discussion has always continued, but we have not always had that nudge. I think the Senator has given us that nudge in the past four months.

**Assemblywoman Spiegel:**

Commissioner Berkbigler, I understand that you just received the amendment only recently, as have we all. I know you said the Washoe County Commission has not had a chance to look at it, and I understand that completely. But I am curious about your personal, initial thoughts on it.

**Marsha Berkbigler:**

I personally do not have a problem with this amendment. I would say to this Committee, as I said to Chairman Ellison this morning: I find it irritating that local governments cannot get along well enough to fix their own problems. Putting a requirement in legislation that we come back is something I find a little obnoxious, but that is life. I personally have no problem with these meeting requirements.

**Steve Driscoll, City Manager, City of Sparks:**

While our City Council has not been able to take official review or action on the amendment, our platform allows me to come and answer your questions. I think it is important to understand that the City of Sparks is already doing what this bill says. Our automatic aid agreements are for all services provided by the Sparks Fire Department. It takes into consideration that more than 80 percent of the calls we go to on a regular basis are medical related. It is a combination of service with other entities and with the local ambulance authority that is responsible for transport. That has already been handled from our perspective. While the dispatch technology is not where it needs to be, those telephone calls happen very quickly. The Sparks Fire Department responds to wherever those agreements are. The mutual aid agreement differentiates between phone calls. Sparks is focused on the citizens and visitors of the city and surrounding communities. We have had these agreements in place for a long time, more than a decade, before any mergers or service agreements were there. We have maintained those under the direction of the Council and negotiated those, taking into consideration financial consequences, if any. They have worked well for the people we serve.

The amendment is a difficult position for me, because there is nothing in the amendment that does not sound good, or is not good for the community as a whole. The objection that the City of Sparks would have is that it contemplates consolidation as the ultimate decision. Our Council has been very clear that we share services, mutually do many things such as training, using similar equipment, respond to calls, and do everything we can possibly do to help the citizens, but the Council does not feel that it requires consolidation. We can work together and maintain governance of the City of Sparks over its taxpayer monies to provide services for taxpayers, but also be a good partner to our outlying areas. Emergency calls are happening daily, as Chief Moore said.

In the City of Sparks, we do have three-person fire engines because more than 80 percent of our calls are for medical reasons. All of our seven engines, which were not shut down during the recession, are licensed by the state to provide intermediate level life support. We work together with local transportation, paramedic agencies, and the other two agencies that surround Sparks. Our citizens get the response they need. When there is a fire, clearly it takes a lot more response. There has been discussion on "two in, two out." My Council recognizes that is a limited discussion. The national standard for fighting a structure fire is 14. There are not 14 people on any one fire engine. The first responder begins the initial attack. In a lot of situations, that attack is laying line and doing necessary setup. Before you are even ready to go inside, you must have the necessary number of people to get there. It will always take more than one rig. The City of Sparks also has an Insurance Service Office rating of 2, with three-person engines. The rating is based on a lot of things, such as the availability of water and resources. We feel strongly that we have been the best possible partner to the region, and we do not need the requirements of consolidation to do that. The amendment requires a lot of work from the entities, and I would caution against putting ourselves in a position of having one or two agencies dictating to others and mandating consolidation when governance of local resources should stay with the local jurisdiction.

**Chairman Ellison:**

This is not about crossing lines, it is about what we are doing already. How far is your jurisdiction boundary? For instance, Elko has a ten-mile boundary.

**Steve Driscoll:**

We have geographically based automatic aid agreements. If you look at the top right blue area of the map ([Exhibit F](#)), we automatically go up into that area. There is a lot of municipal style housing in the northern Spanish Springs area. That is the area that TMFPD has asked us to do automatic aid in. That is where we go. We also work interfaces with the City of Reno where necessary. Through mutual aid, we go as far as we are requested to go. We do that on

a regular basis. Mutual aid is different than automatic aid, but automatic aid is about the quickest possible response. While Station 5 is very close, in the northeast corner, when TMFPD calls, they might be busy and we have a system to be automatically called for aid. We run the closest available truck. We may get far into Sparks, and they are still the first ones to respond.

**Thomas G. Daly, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada:**

I am a property owner in the City of Reno and a resident of the SFPD and unincorporated Washoe County. I am speaking for myself and many of my neighbors, some of who are behind me in the audience. I am in support of S.B. 185 (R2) before this current amendment. I would like to clarify that as a property owner in the SFPD, my fire taxes have decreased every year for the last three years. I now have two fire stations close to my community, the Estates at Mount Rose: the Arrowcreek station and Galena Forest station. Before 2012, the Galena Forest station was not staffed. I have better protection at a lower cost today. [Submitted written testimony ([Exhibit G](#)).]

The lack of automatic aid between the City of Reno and the Truckee Meadows and Sierra Fire Protection Districts is a recent phenomenon. For more than 20 years, until March 2012, these jurisdictions enjoyed a restricted automatic aid agreement, the "1991 Emergency Aid Agreement." Only after the City of Reno unilaterally cancelled this agreement in March 2012 have these jurisdictions lacked such mutual protection. The TMFPD Board of Fire Commissioners has, on three occasions since, offered an automatic aid agreement to the City of Reno. In all three instances, Reno has said no. Both the citizens of Reno and the citizens of unincorporated Washoe County voted overwhelmingly in 2012 in support of automatic aid on that ballot advisory question. Some 74,000 City of Reno constituents, 84 percent of the vote, favored automatic aid and 77 percent of unincorporated Washoe County residents also favored automatic aid. To date, the Reno City Council has ignored their citizens' advice on this issue.

The lack of automatic aid has catastrophic consequences as we learned on New Year's morning ([Exhibit H](#)). In the early morning hours of January 1 of this year, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Pete Almeida on Rhyolite Circle, in the TMFPD just outside of the Reno city limits, was destroyed in a fire. In that fire, Mrs. Almeida was injured and Mr. Almeida, a disabled Army veteran, lost his life.

On that morning, the closest TMFPD crew to the Almeida residence was engaged fighting another fire. The closest available staffed fire station, Reno Fire Station 12 Steamboat Parkway, was not dispatched, as no automatic

aid agreement existed as the result of the Reno City Council's cancellation of the decades-old agreement.

We will never know whether that crew could have affected a rescue of Mr. Almeida, but we do know that this Reno fire crew was never given the chance to try, as they were never dispatched.

I ask you today, how many more citizens must die and how many more homes must burn to the ground before action is taken to require automatic aid among Washoe County fire jurisdictions?

I implore you to approve S.B. 185 (R2) and forward this bill to the Assembly floor for action. Thank you. As you vote on this Memorial Day, remember veteran Peter Almeida.

**Chairman Ellison:**

That is why we are here. This is going to happen. Even if the fire crew could not, they should have had the chance to try to get to that fire.

**Malachy Horan, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada:**

I am a resident of Washoe County, and I would like to thank the Committee for providing time to discuss this issue. As background, I have personal experience with fires. When I was six years old, a fireman rescued me from the bathtub because there was a fire in the front of my home. The worst experience was growing up with my father. He had 70 percent of his body burned in World War II, and as a young man I can remember some very unfortunate screaming, because he was not always able to feel good about it. When we talk about automatic aid, the key focus is safety. We can put automatic aid in right now. It is already in southern Nevada and most places in California. It is a simple infrastructure. I am somewhat taken aback by the idea of consolidating the fire departments. But I do believe in safety. Putting in automatic aid and getting rid of personal opinions between two groups is the way to go. Consolidation may not be. I have not had a chance to research this, but there was a lack of trust. If you do anything, put in automatic aid and improve the trust between the two groups. That is a stepping stone.

There are some major issues and differences between the City of Reno and Washoe County. Building trust is the start, because it has not existed over the last few years. Recently, there was a merger of the water authorities of Washoe County and Truckee Meadows. It took five years to finalize negotiations. Some of the minor differences in the City of Reno are they have past service costs for firefighters, \$18 million in unfunded workers' compensation, unfunded postretirement medical benefits of \$68 million and

growing, and they will have unfunded pension costs. This adds up to \$100 million. As a taxpayer, I do not want to pay for past service costs for another organization. I want to have automatic aid put in. If the voters want consolidation of the fire departments, have the City of Reno and Washoe County put out the vote. The City of Reno's plan for a merger is \$70 million. They will find less than 0.5 percent savings. I was a chief financial officer for a major Fortune 500 company, and I think we need to do this right. We need to take the time to understand who will be accountable. Get automatic aid now, put out the vote, and let the voters decide if we should consolidate.

**Mike Troy, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada:**

I live just south of Reno. I am here because I am frustrated. I have used fire service when it was consolidated and when it was not, once for a neighbor and once for myself. I have seen the difference. Automatic aid is critical. It is foolish to not have automatic aid. I have worked for volunteer fire departments in small towns in other states. Having to have this conversation is terrible, but I think until Reno decides they do not have to take things over, we should have automatic aid in place so all citizens are covered. Both fire departments are good. I am so proud of Chief Moore. But I do not want consolidation under any circumstances. We should pass this bill and get automatic aid in place.

**V.J. "Jerry" Gamroth, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada:**

I am a 30-year resident of Virginia Foothills in unincorporated Washoe County. I think it is sad that you and the citizens here have been pushed by Reno into a hearing today that was scheduled for last week. This is a very special day honoring veterans. Automatic aid should not be a discussion, but a matter of fact. It provides protection for people and property. Without it, fire casualties can be seriously impacted, as has been the case. For the past year, the City of Reno has rebuffed all efforts by Washoe County to effect automatic aid. That is in effect in most fire service areas in the United States. The Los Angeles area's 20 to 30 fire departments are all connected with automatic aid. Clark County has Las Vegas Fire Department, Henderson Fire Department, Boulder City Fire Department, North Las Vegas Fire Department, and so on. They are all connected with automatic aid. It is the same in Elko. Sparks and Carson City have automatic aid with TMFPD. This bill should be passed without these amendments, because it does not preclude any of these meetings in the City of Reno amendment. While these meetings are happening, the people will still not be protected. We need automatic aid. I want to thank the Committee for their hard work on this special day.

**Assemblywoman Joiner:**

I appreciate the perspectives of the citizens we just heard from. We heard several claims about the City of Reno turning down offers of automatic aid from the County. That is new information to me, and I am unclear on what happened. Could we ask the representatives from the City of Reno to clarify that for us?

**Andrew Clinger:**

I think the testimony needs clarifying. In the way it was presented, it seemed that the City of Reno just rejected offers for automatic aid. The City of Reno is in favor of automatic aid. We understand that automatic aid works. Part of what we have been asking Washoe County is exactly what we are asking for in section 2 of our amendment ([Exhibit D](#)): we should define the geography and cost reimbursement, if any. That has been rejected by Washoe County in the past. To say that the City of Reno has flatly rejected automatic aid is untrue.

**Dave Cochran:**

I wanted to clarify about the Rhyolite fire. The mutual aid agreement in place was used on that fire. In fact, Engine 12 was requested and immediately sent out. They were cancelled en route, so it is not accurate to say that they were not dispatched or never responded. They were requested and did respond.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

The four private residents who were up here are saying that the City of Reno is the cause of this, and the City of Reno is saying that Washoe County is the cause of this, and Washoe County says that the City of Reno is not coming to the table. It is very hazy right now, and I would like some clarification. I understand there is an amendment, and I have read it and found that it looks agreeable. Who is to blame here?

**Chairman Ellison:**

We should never live in the past. We should learn from the past, but look to the future. That is what we have to do here. We need to look at what we can do to fix the problem right away. That has been my philosophy in my life. If you do not learn from the past, you will linger in the past forever. I think we are trying to fix things going forward now. We cannot sit here and point fingers. Is there anyone else in favor of the bill? [There was no one.] Those opposed?

**Dennis Jacobsen, Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada:**

Before I start, I would like to thank any veterans in this room for your service and sacrifice. I am not a veteran, but I have been a public servant. I am a professional with over 32 years of experience in local fire and EMS delivery. I also serve as the current president of a local labor association, but most

importantly, I come before this Committee representing my family as Washoe County residents for over four decades. I do not wish to belabor the point, but history is very important, and I believe the solution is in the history. I rise today in opposition to S.B. 185 (R2) in its current form without the amendments, but for reasons you may not think. I have always supported efficient, professional public service and continue to do so. Therefore, I must oppose this bill in its current form. In short, it does little or nothing to advance public safety in our community and our local history has proven this time and again. [Continued to read from ([Exhibit I](#)).]

Senate Bill 185 (R2) in its current form is nothing more than a bandage without stickum. It will fail as soon as it is placed, leaving the wound just as exposed as before. It is contrary to every evaluating expert's professional opinion and, more importantly, has been shown by our history not to have been the solution. Let us redefine or modernize the current system, which has functioned well for decades, while moving forward to a true regional solution, an action that does not require current state legislation to accomplish. We must put local politics aside and come together to create a single, regional model, that provides the same high levels of medical and emergency service to every address in Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County. [Continued to read from ([Exhibit I](#)).]

**Chairman Ellison:**

Are there any questions from the Committee? [There were none.] Is there anyone else in opposition? [There was no one.] Is there anyone who is neutral?

**Tom Clark, representing Regional Emergency Medical Service Authority:**

The Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority (REMSA) is the primary ambulance provider in Washoe County, which works closely with fire services. I am neutral because we do not have a dog in this race. If the amendment passes, which we do not have a position on, we will work to do whatever this Committee and others wish the entities involved to do. We are a nonprofit organization that provides emergency medical services on a regional basis. We are already regional. We go to Sparks or Washoe County or the City of Reno. We look forward to working together to make sure all residents are safe.

**Michael D. Brown, Fire Chief, North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District:**

My fire protection district is located in Washoe County and Incline-Crystal Bay. We are an all-risk fire agency, similar to the other fire departments represented today. We provide paramedic services and transport ambulance services in Washoe County. We are the second provider, but there are actually three: REMSA, North Lake Tahoe FPD, and the Gerlach volunteers. I am neutral on this. I have watched, read, and witnessed what is taking place. We truly

believe that automatic mutual aid is something that is needed not only here, but throughout the nation. We provide services to our neighbors in California on a daily basis. We also work closely with our partners here in Nevada. When you are making recommendations on this, please keep in mind that this will affect all of Washoe County the way it is currently written. Our services work with our neighbors. We work closely with the City of Reno, City of Sparks, TMFPD, and the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority. We provide services to them, and we have never been denied services to our organization in past requests. We truly believe that the closest resources need to be dispatched. As we heard today, it is imperative that we get services to people when they call for them. The dispatch was mentioned also. Dispatch is our primary conduit to the 911 requester. We have dispatch programs in Washoe County that work, but we are working to try to improve them. It starts with the 911 call. We need to ensure that call is handled and monitored, as well as responded to in a proper way. As was mentioned, it is happening and will take some time. We support working with those organizations and agencies.

**Chairman Ellison:**

Are there any questions for the Chief? [There were none.] I think a big thing will be dispatch and education.

**Assemblyman Carrillo:**

Could we bring up representatives from southern Nevada? I would like to hear their take on how it is done in southern Nevada.

**Rusty McAllister, President, Professional Fire Fighters of Nevada:**

I testified as neutral on this bill in the Senate because I represent firefighters from both departments. From that standpoint, this sounds more like a battle between local governments and fire department administrations. In southern Nevada, we have a very good working relationship between the four fire departments in the Las Vegas Valley: Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Clark County, and the Henderson Fire Departments. Three of those dispatch from one centralized dispatch center. It is funded by Clark County, Las Vegas, and North Las Vegas on a proportional basis, which is based on the number of calls they handle. Each entity has a cost-sharing responsibility. All 911 calls go through the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. The dispatcher asks if the call is for police, fire, or medical. Then it is automatically transferred over to the dispatch center for the fire department, and a dispatcher takes the call there, plugs in the address, takes the nature of the call, and sends it to the appropriate dispatcher according to whether it is Clark County or North Las Vegas. Then that dispatcher will put in the address. All of our vehicles in southern Nevada are equipped with an automatic vehicle locator, which is based on satellites. The computer will pick up the closest available



unit and automatically shift the call to the closest unit, regardless of jurisdiction or location. If I am on my fire engine and down at the training center on the other side of town out of my area, and a call comes in when I am driving on the freeway back to my station, I will be picked up and diverted off the freeway to go to that call. It is a system that works well.

From what has been described to me by the members of the two departments that I represent in northern Nevada, that is not the way it works here. I am not sure how the implementation will work exactly. The first thing I thought of is that there might be a liability issue: who is liable if they do not send the closest unit because they do not know who is closest? It would not be because they do not want to. Both entities have indicated they want to send the closest unit and want people to be taken care of. My concern is for the people I represent. The people running calls just want to do calls. They do not care who is in charge. They want to take care of people, and that is what they signed up to do. It is a matter of working out details, and hopefully there will be time put into that.

I looked at the amendment. It makes sense, and furthers conversations. My conversation with Senator Kieckhefer was that he wanted to stimulate a conversation. I think that amendment would continue to do that. I am not advocating one way or another about consolidation or regionalization. I just want to make sure the people running calls have direction about how to do it. It is important that they know what rules they are working under. We have a good system in southern Nevada. There are other models out there in the United States for regional fire departments that work.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I believe fire personnel and police are soldiers. When the call comes in, they do not pick and choose, they go where they are told to go. That is how they operate. That is why I think it is important to come back to dispatch.

**Rusty McAllister:**

I agree. In the station I worked at, I ran into Clark County personnel every day on calls. We have training with all the departments, whether it is high-rise training or structural firefighting. We all work under the same command system and all have radios that can communicate with each other. There are no differences between us. If there are differences in techniques, each department's leadership meets monthly to work through those issues to make sure we are all able to function on a daily basis. We just run calls.

**Chairman Ellison:**

I would like to get the Mayor and the County Commissioner back up. I hate to put you on the hot seat—that is a fireman joke. I know you two will meet. You have heard the testimony today, and I think you are the key to this issue. I hope you will meet with both agencies and tell them how concerned we are. If you can get back in touch with me, we will hold this bill as long as we can to hear from you. I am sure that from hearing the testimony, your hearts are in the right spots.

**Hillary Schieve:**

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate it, and we will absolutely report back to you tomorrow after our meeting. I look forward to holding that meeting and hope we continue in a positive direction. Like Assemblywoman Dooling said, the people do not care about our issues, they just want the issues to be fixed. I think we can do that relatively quickly. I would imagine Commissioner Berkbigler would say the same.

**Marsha Berkbigler:**

I agree with the Mayor. I appreciate you taking the time to hear this issue, which we should have been able to fight on our own level and not bring to your attention. For that, I ask your forgiveness. I would tell you that I had an interesting opportunity to talk to the City of Reno, TMFPD, and SFPD firefighters shortly after the Caughlin Ranch fire, where a number of homes were burned. I asked them if they knew whether they were fighting a fire in the City of Reno or Washoe County, because Caughlin Ranch has land in both areas. They said, No, that is your problem. They said that all they were interested in was putting the fire out and did not care which jurisdiction it was in. I wanted to say that I appreciate Mr. McAllister coming forward. I think our firefighters are all great people and just want to do the job. We have to figure out how to make this work so that they are all working together.

**Chairman Ellison:**

If anyone can get everyone to cooperate, it is you two women. [An email ([Exhibit J](#)) from Janet and David Ouren was submitted but not discussed, and will become part of the record.] I will close the hearing on S.B. 185 (R2). Is there any public comment? [There was none.] We are adjourned [at 11:25 a.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

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Erin Barlow  
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

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Assemblyman John Ellison, Chairman

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

<b><u>EXHIBITS</u></b>			
<b>Committee Name: <u>Assembly Committee on Government Affairs</u></b>			
<b>Date: <u>May 25, 2015</u></b>		<b>Time of Meeting: <u>9:07 a.m.</u></b>	
<b>Bill</b>	<b>Exhibit</b>	<b>Witness / Agency</b>	<b>Description</b>
	A		Agenda
	B		Attendance Roster
S.B. 185 (R2)	C	Charles Moore / Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and Sierra Fire Protection District	Reported Structure Fires and Closest Fire Station by Travel Time Map
S.B. 185 (R2)	D	Scott Gilles / City of Reno	Proposed Amendments
S.B. 185 (R2)	E	Hillary Schieve / City of Reno	Video Links
S.B. 185 (R2)	F	Charles Moore / Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and Sierra Fire Protection District	Reno Fire Department Stations as of April 3, 2014 Map
S.B. 185 (R2)	G	Thomas G. Daly / Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada	Testimony
S.B. 185 (R2)	H	Thomas G. Daly / Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada	Photograph
S.B. 185 (R2)	I	Dennis Jacobsen / Private Citizen, Washoe County, Nevada	Testimony
S.B. 185 (R2)	J	Janet and David Ouren / Private Citizens	Email