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To: Statewide Training and Education Advisory Committee
State Board of Fire Services

From: Mark Bisbee, SFT Battalion Chief (RA)

SUBJECT/AGENDA ACTION ITEM:

Fire Officer 4 (FO4) Delivery Model

Recommended Actions:

Approve delivery model in concept and empower staff to work with CalChiefs to form a pilot FO4 implementation workgroup.

Background Information:

Prior to 2012 and STEAC's embrace of NFPA professional qualifications in the CFSTES curriculum, Chief Officer courses were taught at the Asilomar State Conference Grounds through the Monterey Peninsula College.

While the shift to NFPA standards has significantly improved both curriculum and reciprocity issues, a valuable feature has been lost. Specifically, the idea of a California Fire Academy where chiefs from all over the state convene in a single location to learn from each other through the diverse perspectives and experiences that are the California Fire Service.

The significance of chiefs gathering from the corners of our state, hailing from small North/Far North volunteer agencies to large metro departments from Southern California was our statewide version of the NFA.

Over the past four years, there have only been 10 Executive Chief Fire Officer (ECFO) deliveries, with only 20 instructors able to teach the series, and just 106 ECFO certifications. In the past 25 years, less than 43 people have obtained a Certified Fire Chief (CFC) designation.

Analysis/Summary of Issue:

Participation and Certification: Piloting a single statewide FO4 cohort may boost student, instructor, and certification participation. To increase rates of delivery and certification, instructor capacity must also be addressed.

Accreditation Potential: It would be easier to attain American Council on Education (ACE) accreditation recommendations if an SFT – sponsored delivery model with a single, secured testing platform. This has proven to be a challenge in articulating this curriculum to graduate-level university Master's in Public Administration programs at CSU campuses.

Boosting CFO Designation: the new FO4 curriculum could be tied to the CFC designation as an on-ramp to this prestigious recognition. With only 42 CFCs statewide, having a single SFT-sponsored FO4 delivery may boost these numbers, especially if helping to teach a FO4 Topic was recognized and acknowledged within the CFC designation criteria.

Cohort-Based Delivery: This follows the NFA model and should be coupled with a strong cadre approach that will also lessen the impact and lighten the load of a single instructor grappling to deliver the entire curriculum. The cohort-based learning provides a diversity of backgrounds and agencies that regional deliveries often lack and helps bridge the “lonely at the top” gap by building a supportive statewide network. FO4 students could become cadre for 3-5 years, then transition/hand-off to newer former students, keeping perspectives and curriculum fresh. Experienced fire chiefs from throughout the state could continue to participate as guest lecturers.

Delivery Format: Ideally, the course would be hybrid throughout a year. Remote check-ins would be ideal for Certification Task Book alignment of assignments. In-person Units could be delivered in various locations throughout the state, including Sacramento, Southern California, Bay Area, Central Valley, and North/Far North. In-person discussion sites could also leverage existing fire chief-level conferences and meetings for four-hour in person sessions at:

- Cal-JAC
- CalChiefs
- Training Officer's Symposium
- FIRESCOPE
- FDAC
- League of Cities
- ICMA
- Other venues

Summary: The intent of this program is to emulate the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program at the state level while integrating NFPA FO4 professional standards into the curriculum. A return to cohort-based training should be explored in a pilot program consisting of SFT- delivered FO4 core courses that capitalize on our state's cultural, demographic, and geographic diversity. This delivery model should leverage existing programs, build a strong and continuously renewing cadre, and increase participation of students, instructors, and certifications, including the SFT CFC designation.