

VCTA Comments – 02/25/25

RE: Agenda Item 34 - Revised Draft Request for Proposal (RFP)

Good morning, Chair Parvin, members of the Board, and CEO Johnson. I'm Ryan Grau, Executive Director of the Ventura County Taxpayers Association. I stand here today because both VCTA and the public at large are watching this process closely and are committed to ensuring that government processes in general are transparent and accountable to the taxpayers we serve.

We have witnessed in other counties egregious abuses of public trust and massive, indefensible wastes of taxpayer dollars in the EMS contracting process. In Santa Barbara County, nearly a million dollars was spent on outside legal defenses for indefensible actions; they invested around \$3 million on ambulances that now sit unused, costing the County an additional \$16,000 every month merely to park them. In San Bernardino, similar missteps have led to judicial decisions against the County government. These are not isolated mistakes but cautionary tales that we cannot, under any circumstances, allow to be repeated here.

My concern today centers on the process being established for the evaluation of our County's EMS RFP. The proposed structure increases county-appointed evaluators to five, while only two positions are reserved for the more impartial consultants. The makeup was previously three from the County and two from the consultants - to say this shift is concerning is an understatement. This imbalance is particularly troubling given that the County is, in effect, bidding on its own contract. With County Fire—a component of our own government—actively participating as a bidder, this arrangement creates a conflict of interest that inherently risks bias, undermining the integrity of the entire procurement process.

It is critical that we establish an Evaluation Committee free from even the perception of favoritism or bias. The public must be assured that the process is conducted with the highest standards of fairness and objectivity, free from any undue influence that might arise from such imbalances.

I encourage you to rethink the committee's makeup to minimize bias and ensure the process is fair, open, and balanced. One approach could be inviting community members to apply—much like a school bond oversight committee—using a voir dire-style vetting, similar to jury selection, to screen for impartiality. Rather than drawing from the Board, consider a public call for candidates to keep it independent. The goal is a committee free from undue influence, built on trust and transparency, though it'll take careful execution to get there.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to accountability in government.