



**North County Regional Fire Authority
COMMISSIONER'S MEETING**

**July 24, 2024
4:00pm**

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Chair Oertle called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

The following attendees were present:

COMMISSIONERS

Ric Cade
Rob Johnson
Leonard Kelley
~~Greg Oakes~~, excused
Marilyn Oertle
Al Schreiber
Holly Sloan-Buchanan

FIRE AUTHORITY STAFF

John Cermak, Fire Chief
Dave Kraski, Deputy Fire Chief
Kari Wheeler, Administrative Assistant/Comm. Secretary
Randy Krumm, Finance Director
Steve Goforth, Assistant Chief CRR
Doug ten Hoopen, Assistant Chief Support Services

Commissioner Chair Oertle led the room in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC AND EMPLOYEE COMMENTS – *there were no public or employee comments*

IAFF LOCAL 3438 REPORT

Member, Anna Melillo, share the following statement with the Board:

Good afternoon. My name is Anna Melillo and I have been an employee with Arlington & North County Fire for almost 10 years. I have been in the fire service for 14 years. I am here today to talk on behalf of myself, our local, all the locals from the Canadian border up through Marysville, and the Washington State Council of Firefighters. I am here to ask the Commission to consider hiring Julie Boyer.

A few things you may not know about me: I am this fire departments designated Peer Support Team Lead.

I am also the sole representative from District 8 of the WSCFF Standing Committee on Behavioral Health. This committee was created 2 years ago because there was an overwhelming outcry from locals and administrations across the state, for something to be done to help with the persistent and growing need to help firefighters in their mental health.

Since our inception the committee has gathered data on what departments across the state are doing to assist with mental health of their employee's. We have put out surveys to determine how to best reach firefighters when they are in need. Recently at our state convention we asked the floor for funding for 3 peer support trainings to occur in 2025. We found that a lot of smaller departments don't have access to the funding or ability to get the initial training needed to start a peer support team. But



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they should. So, we asked our brothers and sisters to step up and pay for that ability out of their pockets. We also asked to add a family member to our committee because we feel having a voice from what our families (who have to deal with us) was also critically important.

Both of those resolutions passed unanimously and with very little discussion.

I have also had the privilege to serve as a fire commissioner in Whatcom County. I feel I understand the unique position that you are in, trying to figure out the needs of the department and its employee's and juggle that with the finances you are responsible for.

Now I say all these things to let you know that I'm kinda familiar with this topic.

I feel like you have heard plenty about why peer support teams are needed. You are aware of the statistics of firefighter suicide and PTSD rates. You also know about the individuals in our OWN department that we have had to send to PTSD rehab. I don't feel like I need to rehash any of that information.

I want to share with you my experience. I am a mom of 4 kids. Ages are 19, 18, 13 and 11.

My kids don't use drugs, but I regularly respond to overdose deaths where I walk in the room, look down at the patient, and immediately get a shot of adrenaline from fear thinking: that could be my son. I don't have any control over that thought entering my mind, but I have to push the thought aside and do what I'm trained to do.

I go on suicide calls where a teenager has decided to end their life and have to sit there and listen to the parents scream and cry "why me," and I think: "that could be me." But I have to push the thought aside and console the parents and try not to cry myself.

I go on car accidents where I get on a gruesome scene of some kid driving too fast and think- OMG this could be my kid. But I have to push that thought away and do my job. Some of you are familiar of that.

This is just my experience. But I guarantee that to some degree this is also everyone that works here. And like my coworkers, I have a very limited understanding of how to cope with these thoughts. We are just forced to try to forget about it and go about our day. But eventually it catches up with us. I fear the day it catches up with me.

This was especially apparent on a recent call where we had to work a very long code on a still born baby. When all was said and done someone thankfully called Julie in to debrief the call. While she was walking people through what happened, I started to realize that 6 of the 9 young men in the room were new parents with BABIES. And they had to try to ignore the Dad weeping in the corner of the room the entire time. You cant say this did not or will not continue to, affect them.



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I tell you these things to let you know that I am not trained to deal with that. They are not trained to deal with that. And the peer support team is not trained to deal with that.

I'm not a therapist now because I did some peer support training.

I can't even find a therapist that understands my job well enough that I don't have to spend the first 5 sessions explaining what I do for a living while they look at me in shock. That is very common. And that, by the way, is what our EAP can offer us. They can provide us therapists in the area. They don't have clinically competent therapists. And I don't know who those people are, otherwise I would be using one of them.

I'm not an expert. I can't lead trainings for the team.

I also can't help team members when they are struggling- because they have secondary trauma when they have to listen to what someone else went through. I can't help them, because I'm one of them. So how am I supposed to help the helpers, as the team lead? As the "expert." I have no training on that.

Our job as peer support is to be the eyes in the field. We are supposed to notice when someone is struggling, or be there when someone comes to us and needs to talk. That's it, that's all we are trained on. We are like the middle-men in the scenario and are supposed to connect them with the right resources. But I don't have anyone to lead them to.

This is why we need Julie.

She is the expert on dealing with these things.

She has the resources to direct people to the clinically competent therapists, which is what we need in this industry.

She is trained to come in after a rough call and debrief us.

Not me, and not anyone else on the team.

We need the leadership that she provides.

Anna

Commissioner Oakes asked how many members are on the peer support team. Ann stated there are 11 members and they have only had 1 training.

MOTION TO APPROVE AGENDA with a correction to be made on the date. (Should be July 24, 2024 rather than July 26, 2024)

1st: Commissioner Schreiber 2nd Commissioner Cade

Discussion:

APPROVED: Unanimous



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MOTION TO APPROVE CONSENT AGENDA

1st: Commissioner Cade **2nd** Commissioner Schreiber

Discussion: none – [see attachment](#)

APPROVED: Unanimous

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Pacific Northwest Support Services – guest, Julie Boyer

Julie Boyer of Pacific Northwest Support Services (PNSS) thanked the Commission for inviting her to speak. She indicated she has had the honor of working alongside both North County and Arlington Fire since 2015 and was there to share about the new organization with which she works and expound upon a proposal to provide specific services to NCRFA.

Julie shared the following information with the Board:

PNSS, a new organization, formally launched in June 2024, is a non profit in WA State and has Federal 501c3 nonprofit corporation classification. PNWW exists exclusively to support First Responders in the communities they serve.

PNSS currently serves nine area departments with plans to limit departmental growth in the near future to focus on building relationships with their agency members and their families.

PNSS is focusing on three primary areas – Community Chaplain response; First Responder education and support; and, Peer Support Team coaching and Training. They currently have 10 team members with over 75 years of experience. Some members of team focus solely on Chaplaincy, some mainly on peer support coaching and some do both. All members of the PNSS team have been serving in these areas in Snohomish County and Community Chaplaincy or First Responder Wellness, and, all have served along NCRFA in the past at some point.

Ms. Boyer shared [a proposal](#) with the board that she stated had been sent to Chief Cermak and Deputy Chief Kraski on June 25 at the request of Local 3438. The proposal focuses on peer support coaching and training and working with the department to continue to build out a framework for a behavioral health response. PNSS is not offering Community Chaplain on scene response as they understand NCRFA is continuing to work with NWIS to provide this service.



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She indicated PNSS has no desire to compete or undermine other Chaplaincy services in the area. Since NWIS is no longer able to provide services around behavioral health response, peer support coaching, peer support team development, or, critical incident stress management support, that is what PNSS is offering.

Ms. Boyer cited several reasons that behavioral health is needed in the fire service.

Ms. Boyer stated that the proposal given and what PNSS offers, addresses a piece of the wellness wheel. PNSS provides immediate 24/7 trauma mitigation support to members and the peer support team to help match individuals and families with culturally competent therapists.

Ms. Boyer said that PNSS can support the trained peer team members as they grow in their role. She shared that most of NCRFA's peer support team members have only had foundational training as the team was formed about 2 years ago and then they (NWIS) were able to sponsor their first training for the team to receive their initial peer support certification for the state.

Ms. Boyer stated PNSS does not desire to replace peer support team members or EAP (Employee Assistance Programs). Ms. Boyer states, "We are not clinicians doing therapy or offering post-traumatic stress treatment. We can offer training help with critical incident stress management immediately following an incident, raise awareness, and connect members and families to all of these resources rapidly and immediately when needed."

In her closing comments to Commissioners, Ms. Boyer stated "our desire is to help this department continue to develop resiliency by building on the basics. We are merely requesting to do so under a new name and with a new organization." She then thanked the Board and asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Kelley asked who else PNSS had contracts with (which agencies).

Ms. Boyer stated they had formal contracts with Lynden Police Department, Mount Vernon Police Department, Mount Vernon Fire Department, Camano Island Fire and Rescue, Darrington Fire Department, Oso Fire Department, Getchell Fire Department. She stated they will have a contract with Tulalip Bay Fire finalized soon, and also, that they contract with Arlington Police Department, and have Mutual Aid Agreements with Snohomish County Sheriff's North Precinct, Stanwood Police Department, and Tulalip Police Department. Ms. Boyer stated that there are three additional departments requesting her to bring them on, but



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she thinks they will only take one to not "get a mile wide and an inch deep" but wants to be able to do well what they do.

Commissioner Schreiber asked if there were any departments close to NCRFA's size. Ms. Boyer indicated North County would be their largest department.

Ms. Boyer indicated that they provide community chaplain response for just over half of their departments and the rest of their departments are solely the peer support coaching and the behavioral health and wellness framework piece.

Commissioner Kelley asked how long Ms. Boyer had been working with Stanwood.

Ms. Boyer explained that as a new organization, only a couple of months, but under the umbrella of a different organization as an extension of their work with Snohomish County Sheriff, they have been working with Stanwood for the "last several years".

Commissioner Cade asked Ms. Boyer if the other agencies are essentially working off the same agreement or contract.

Ms. Boyer indicated it is all the same document

A question of NCRFA providing badges or patches, noted in the proposal from PNSS, was raised as well as how that works, i.e. Switching badges 10 different times as your go to 10 different agencies.

Ms. Boyer indicated that most agencies choose that their patch is changed, especially when they are on scene, but also that PNSS has their own agency patches.

Ms. Boyer stated when they are requested to come in on a 911 call, they ask their departments to cover that specific insurance. PNSS has liability insurance, but when asked to come on a 911 call, they ask for that to be under the requesting agency's policy.

Commissioner Schreiber asked how many PNSS volunteers would be working specifically with North County Peer Support.

Ms. Boyer stated that they have 6 who are trained and there would probably be three to four who primarily worked with North County.



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Commissioner Schreiber stated that he had not seen a CV or resume on Ms. Boyer's qualifications or PNSS' volunteers. Ms. Boyer indicated those could be provided.

Commissioner Schreiber asked what professional organizations Ms. Boyer is active in.

Ms. Boyer stated she is active in International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, First Responder Support Network, Seattle Fire Training Ground, CJTC (Criminal Justice Training Center) when they host chaplain academies and also when some of their behavioral health committees have met.

Commissioner Schreiber asked Ms. Boyer what training or certification she has as a trainer. Ms. Boyer stated she had "several" from International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, and others with compassion fatigue training, with ACES training and several other endorsements along the way from week-long or month-long training blocks.

Commissioner Kelley asked how many paid employees PNSS has. Ms. Boyer said PNSS currently has 1 paid employee (her) with a goal of having several part-time paid employees and eventually contracted employees would come from the peer support teams they've helped develop over the years, so they could help work with other departments.

Ms. Boyer noted that they don't lead all of their trainings, but have the clinicians they work with come in. Previously, they were able to get a grant to host one of the foundational trainings for National Peer Support Certification.

Commissioner Oakes asked if there was any proactive training that PNSS does for the firefighters, rather than it all being reactionary.

Ms. Boyer indicated this was an area she wants to continue moving on. She said North County was the first agency that requested that do foundational resiliency training.

Ms. Boyer reiterated that they do not charge for community chaplaincy, and that should always be a volunteer piece. The financial compensation provided by North County (previously) was not going towards that (chaplaincy services). It was sometimes used for mileage reimbursement, uniform replacement or continuing education for chaplains. The bulk of the finances were going because they were doing so many additional trainings. It had been woven in to part-time training, full-time new hire training and lateral firefighter training – it was a piece of the beginning of launching that "cultural change". At the time there was a shift



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and change in leadership and things "halted" with the previous organization, they were in the process of developing a curriculum for families (of first responders).

Commission Chair Oertle thanked Ms. Boyer for her explanation to the board, then asked if HR Director Jubb would share any concerns that may be related to how to "make this happen liability wise".

Director Jubb would advise any contract with PNSS has a good explanation of services and that the boundary of counseling – making sure we don't ever encroach on that as there would be great liability risk. We aren't mental health providers and NCRFA isn't purporting to provide mental health services through PNSS. Director Jubb is not clear on whether our liability would insure covering a volunteer that was volunteering for another agency, but showing up at our site. Director Jubb does feel there is a way to work through this contract. Once Director Jubb felt comfortable with the language, she would want NCRFA's attorney to review the contract and felt comfortable with it. In follow to the question of whether an RFP would be required, Director Jubb felt the answer is no, it wouldn't be required for a short-term contract. For broader services, or a longer-term contract, NCRFA may need to look at whether an RFP is required.

Commissioner Schreiber raised the point that if they are PNSS volunteers, rather than North County's, they should be wearing PNSS patches.

Commissioner Kelley stated he felt a little blindsided today because at the last meeting, the commission decided they wanted to know what other counties did and that information was supposed to be brought back as a report to the Commission. He also noted it was discussed that there would be contact made with the Union in an effort to understand what they want and then negotiate that.

Commission Chair Oertle stated the Commission can still get the information they requested, and that this was just an opportunity to hear directly from Julie what they provide and the legalities and liability. Commissioner Oertle said the Commission could certainly move forward with gathering information, this was just part of the process.

Commissioner Kelley reiterated that request was decided at the last meeting and he hadn't seen that information yet.



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Commissioner Sloan-Buchanan expressed that she felt the Commission got that information from Julie's presentation to the Board. Commissioner Sloan-Buchanan stated "from what Julie said, they (PNSS) are supporting a lot of the other agencies". Commissioner Sloan-Buchanan said the board is hearing from the union, at Commission meetings, their support (for PNSS).

Commissioner Kelley stated the issue still needs to be negotiated.

Commissioner Oakes noted that the contract was open right now in negotiations.

Commission Chair Oertle agreed it should be part of negotiations then asked "can we do that"?

Commissioner Cade gave a short answer that "yes, that can certainly be part of the contract (CBA) going forward" but expressed that he feels the Board still has to look at what they are going to do for the next 6 months to ensure resources are available. Commissioner Cade asked Director Jubb if it would be reasonable (enough time) to have a proposal, addressing all the boundaries discussed, brought to the Board by the first meeting in August.

Director Jubb felt it was reasonable to have those answers by the first meeting in August. One additional outstanding question was whether these people (PNSS volunteers) are covered under workers comp and who would be reporting hours. Director Jubb's recommendation is to see if we can move forward on the short term.

Director Jubb's understanding of Article 44 of the current CBA is open right now and has a provision for a wellness program including mental health and physical, so it would make sense to have an MOU with the Union to work on that article knowing the Commission may agree to a short term solution to get us through the end of the year, but that by the end of the year we really need a full plan in place to address the full mental and physical health and well-being that meets the interests and needs of the employees. Director Jubb affirmed that all are concerned about this, it's now a matter of how we navigate in the short run, and, the long run. Director Jubb recommends continuing on a parallel path with the only difference being instead of Director Jubb being tasked with negotiating a contract on just resiliency training, with the Board's direction (go forth), she could work with Julie to negotiate a broader agreement and then also request of the Union to have an MOU that says we aren't setting a precedent here, and the Commission really wants to have a full program that includes this.



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Commissioner Schreiber asked questions regarding a 6-month short-term contract, would it extend beyond the 2024 calendar year. Director Jubb explained that it could be either and she will negotiate as directed by the Board.

Commissioner Oakes asked if a bio for Julie could be sent to Commissioners along with any proposed contracts. Commissioner Schreiber requested the same for any volunteers who would be working with North County.

Commissioner Cade offered that based on discussion, he had 5 or 6 key points that he believed the Commission was asking for, and could look over at the next meeting to have a clear path going forward.

1. A proposed MOU to have signed with the Union that addresses that the board is looking at this but they are also looking at the broader program.
2. Address the concerns with the boundaries between peer support and mental health professional treatment.
3. That there would be insurance coordination between the insurance that they (PNSS) has and that NCRFA has with specific dollar amounts that each would cover **AND** a letter of confirmation from our insurance agent that this is acceptable to them.
4. Address with legal and with insurance whether this would be on scene or not on scene work. *Commissioner Cade suggested many times this work could happen shortly after the scene concludes at one of our stations*
5. A report on what the other large agencies in the county are doing.
6. The whole package is reviewed by legal

Commissioner Cade suggested that he thought if the Commission could have this information by the next meeting, he thinks the Board would be ready to make a decision.

The Board affirmed to Director Jubb that if there was a way to calculate and carve out additional services, if NCRFA should choose, that those could be included in a proposed contract with PNSS.

Commissioner Sloan-Buchanan asked if the items Commissioner Cade addressed could be delivered in 2-weeks. Director Jubb will work to gather requested information from the Board and coordinate working with Julie on an LOU with PNSS.



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NEW BUSINESS

Nothing scheduled

CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Cermak is out on vacation. Chief's report was presented by Deputy Chief of Operations, Dave Kraski.

Chief Kraski shared that NCRFA has been recognized with a Mission Lifeline – SILVER Award by the American Heart Association. This award recognizes excellence in stroke and heart attack care. Dr. Corsa had shared with Chief Kraski that this was the first year NCRFA had applied for the award, with Silver being the highest level attainable, but with some work, Dr. Corsa believes NCRFA can attain the GOLD Award.

Chief Kraski shared that on the upcoming Monday, Allison and Kari will be onboarding 10 new part-time employees. Chief Kraski recognized FF/PM Gabe Buonassissi for his work overseeing the part-time employee onboarding process.

Chief Kraski shared the department has been busy with community events, including, large car shows in both Arlington and Stanwood; 4th of July events and parades in both cities; 3-day Arlington Street Fair, which was the biggest ever; and the Stillaguamish Tribal Wellness event. Upcoming events include the Stanwood Fair and Parade and Nation Night Out in both Arlington and Stanwood.

Chief Kraski acknowledged the great work of AC Goforth playing a large part in our community events with the fire prevention.

Labor Negotiations continue, with good progress being made.

Mediation discussions continue with Fire District 21. Chief Eastman, from South County Fire has agreed to be the mediator. He's worked with Commissioner Cade and Commissioner Oertle. There is a tentative date of Tuesday, August 13 for all parties to meet. Chief Eastman asked for a neutral site for parties to meet. Chief Kraski has coordinated a break-out room at Cascade Valley Hospital for the group to meet.

Washington State Dept. of Natural Resources has awarded NCRFA a \$10,000 grant to purchase wildland PPE.



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NCRFA is currently on their second and third wildland mobilization of the year with three members down in Central Oregon working on the Falls Fire.

Chief Kraski recognized FF Keith Johnson as a strike team leader trainee who needs to get a deployment to work on getting his book signed off as a strike team leader. Chief Kraski noted there is a shortage of strike team leaders in the Northwest Region.

The Assistant Chief of EMS position closes today and then review of applicants will begin.

Work continues at Sta 96, a bit behind schedule but making progress.

All stations recently got some gym equipment upgrades totaling about \$15,000. This was funded through a partnership with the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, Firefighter Injury and Illness Reduction Program. Participation in the program reduces our WA L&I rates. We have an MOU with the Union that 50% of the savings from this program will be used towards Fitness and Wellness. Working with Randy we saved about \$33,000, so about \$15,000 of that was used to purchase new gym equipment.

Chief Kraski recognized and congratulated Firefighter / Paramedics Connor Berti-Michael, Drew Norvell and Cameron Pfeifer, all who graduated the last Academy class in mid-May, have now been signed off by the Washington State Department of Health and are licensed paramedics in the State of Washington.

Chief Kraski recognized Kari and Theresa for their keen awareness of a recent attempt of a financial hack that could have been a \$250,000 loss. A job well done and awareness opportunity.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Commissioner Johnson shared that his wife had a recent reaction to some medication she had taken and they called 911. North County came with professionalism and an immediate response. Commissioner Johnson was very proud watching the crew do their work. Commissioner Johnson shared that his wife is doing ok now.

Commissioner Sloan-Buchanan shared with the Board that she and Commissioner Schreiber has gone to visit stations 99, 97, 48 and 46 during all three shifts and told crews to "please share your concerns". Commissioner Sloan-Buchanan said there is a long list of concerns that she is putting together and will present it to the Board.



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MOTION TO ADJOURN 5:21pm

1st: Commissioner Oakes

2nd Commissioner Johnson

Discussion: None

APPROVED: Unanimous

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**Marilyn Oertle
Commission Chair**

8/15/2024

Date Signed

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**Kari Wheeler
Commission Secretary**

8/15/2024

Date Signed