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County Administrator Hart,

I want to first thank you for the guidance provided in the last few months on our approach to seek support from Knox County in our efforts to increase the number of first responders within our towns. As you are well aware, the towns within Knox County have seen a dramatic drop in our first responder membership. I dare say that our volunteer numbers have declined well over fifty percent while our calls for service are increasing. This has forced all of our towns to look at options and find ways to not only replace the number of firefighters within our departments, but also keep the ones we have who are being asked to give more and more every year.

The St. George Volunteer Firefighter and Ambulance Association (SGVFAA) have put years of prep-work and planning into a training facility that is now up and operational in Route 73 in St. George. The facility is a game changer for Knox County and they have joined forces with the Knox County Mutual Aid Association in efforts to not only pay off the more than \$500,000.00 in debt still left on the \$785,000.00 price tag for the building, but to adapt our training as county fire departments which will allow us to retain our firefighters and attract new candidates into our departments.

While we as an organization work to fundraise and pay down the debt incurred to train our firefighters we are asking the budget committee and the Knox County Commissioners to stand behind THEIR first responders and provide funding within the Knox County budget to cover insurance and maintenance costs, up to \$9,000.00. The insurance quote given was \$5000.00 annually plus a \$4,000.00 estimate for maintenance as we put the building through its paces and train Knox County's firefighters and special rescue teams.

As the Knox County Mutual Aid Association, we have committed to covering each other on days and evenings where towns are traveling to St. George to take advantage of the site. We will also begin hosting monthly trainings which will easier allow small groups from departments around Knox County to train in live fire situations as well as a variety of other skilled based classes designed to better protect our towns. This opportunity is something that we never thought would take place within Knox County and we hope you all show your support for the first responders in our County.

Sincerely,

Chris Whytock

Chief Chris Whytock
President