



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER**

**Clerk of the Board of Supervisors**  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Agenda Number:**

**Submitted on:  
(COB Stamp)**

**Department Name:** Fire Department  
**Department No.:** 031  
**Agenda Date:** May 12, 2026  
**Placement:** Administrative Agenda  
**Estimated Time:** N/A  
**Continued Item:** No  
**If Yes, date from:**  
**Vote Required:** Majority

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Garrett Huff, Fire Chief / Fire Warden  
Contact: Pat Byde, Deputy Fire Chief of Operations  
**SUBJECT:** **Acceptance of Cash Donation Greater than \$10,000 from Direct Relief for the Purchase of an AWD Ford Transit Van for UAS Emergency Response**

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Other Concurrence:** Risk Management

As to form: Yes

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Authorize the Santa Barbara County Fire Department (Fire Department) to accept a cash donation in the amount of \$91,100 from Direct Relief, a nonprofit organization, to be used toward the purchase of an all-wheel-drive Ford Transit Van and the associated build-out to support Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) operations.
- b) Determine that the above recommended actions do not constitute a project subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(4), finding that the actions are the creation of a governmental funding mechanism or other government fiscal activity, which do not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment.

**Summary Text:**

On April 24, 2026, the Santa Barbara County Fire Department was awarded a \$91,100 donation from Direct Relief, a nonprofit organization that supports first responders throughout Santa Barbara County. The donation was provided for the specific purpose of purchasing an all-wheel-drive Ford

Transit Van to support the Department’s UAS Program (referred to as the ‘Unmanned Division’ in the grant agreement).

The vehicle will be used to transport multiple drones and associated equipment to incidents throughout the county. Once deployed to an incident, the van will serve as a mobile UAS operations and communications platform. The vehicle will provide a workspace for developing incident maps and mission planning, display live drone video feeds on wall-mounted televisions, and enable live streaming of aerial drone video to fire engines, incident command staff, and the Regional Fire Communication Center (RFCC).

**Background:**

The Fire Department’s Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) program supports incidents throughout the county and state by providing aerial reconnaissance, aerial ignition, damage assessment, and search operations. Most recently, UAS personnel were deployed to the “Eaton” and “Palisades” fires, where drone pilots assisted with structural damage assessments and the search for human remains. In addition, on February 6, 2026, at Haskell’s Beach in Goleta, the UAS team assisted with a water rescue in which a drone was used to locate and support the rescue of a distressed surfer.

During these deployments, the team operated from the Department’s current UAS support vehicle, a two-wheel-drive, 28-year-old van that has been repurposed multiple times throughout its service life. The vehicle originally served as an ambulance in New Cuyama in the late 1990s and was later reassigned in the mid-2000s to support the department’s ocean rescue program by towing jet skis for beach-based water rescue operations. Approximately four years ago, as the Department was developing its UAS program, the van was repurposed once again to transport drones and support live video monitoring during incidents. Since that time, it has been used successfully on dozens of missions.

Given the critical role the UAS program now plays in incident support, the Department began exploring options to replace the aging vehicle with a more reliable, all-wheel-drive platform. On April 24, 2026, Direct Relief graciously awarded \$91,100 to the Fire Department to support the purchase of an all-wheel-drive Ford Transit Van and the necessary modifications to build out the interior for UAS operations and enhance off-road capabilities.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

Revenue will be received in FY 2026-27, at which time a budget adjustment will be processed to increase appropriations and revenues by \$91,100. Any ongoing costs associated with the van will be absorbed by the Fire Department’s budget.

**Fiscal Analysis:**

Funding Source	FY 26/27	Total
Donation	\$91,100	<b>\$91,100</b>
<b>Total</b>	\$91,100	<b>\$91,100</b>

**Staffing Impacts:**

No additional staffing is required.

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A** - Direct Relief Grant Agreement

**Attachment B** - Additional Media

**Contact Information:**

Pat Byde

Deputy Fire Chief of Operations

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