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*Commission on
State Mandates*

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LATE FILING

January 28, 2019

Ms. Heather Halsey
Executive Director
Commission on State Mandates
980 Ninth Street, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814

Response to Test Claim 17-TC-22, Water Code Section 13383(a) Phase I MS4 Trash Order Issued to City of Villa Park, Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, Effective June 2, 2017

Dear Ms. Halsey:

The Department of Finance (Finance) has reviewed Test Claim 17-TC-22, submitted by the City of Villa Park (Claimant). The Test Claim alleges state-mandated, reimbursable costs associated with an executive order (Trash Order) issued to Claimant by the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) on June 2, 2017.

The genesis of the Trash Order is Resolution No. 2015-0019 (Trash Provisions), issued by the State Water Resources Control Board on April 7, 2015. The Trash Order requires Claimant to select a track to follow to comply with the Trash Provisions to limit the discharge of trash into state waters via Claimant's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). Significant among the alleged reimbursable costs are those to "determine which track would allow Claimant to comply with the Trash Provisions..." and to "interpret the Trash Order, including meetings with MS4 co-permittees." Finance rejects the notion that these sample activities are required by the Trash Order. We defer to the Water Boards on the assertion that the test claim activities impose a new program or higher level of service and that they are not a federal mandate. Finance comments on the fee authority issue raised by the Claimant.

Claimant's MS4 is part of their municipal sewer system. This municipal sewer system is funded at least in part by fees imposed on the system's users. Claimant claims not to have the authority to increase these fees to recoup the costs associated with the Trash Order because of limitations imposed by Article XIII D of the California Constitution. Article XIII D states that "(e)xcept for fees or charges for sewer, water, and refuse collection services, no property related fee or charge shall be imposed or increased unless and until that fee or charge is submitted and approved by a majority vote of the property owners of the property subject to the fee or charge..."

Claimant asserts it "...lacks authority to impose property-related fees without voter approval because fees imposed to cover the costs associated with the mandated activities in the Trash Order are not 'charges for sewer, water, and refuse collection services' and do not qualify for an exemption from the voter-approval requirement."

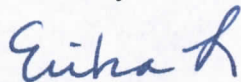
Finance believes Claimant does have stormwater fee authority. Senate Bill 231 (2017), effective January 1, 2018, defines "sewer" for purposes of Article XIII D and its exception to voter approval for sewer, water and refuse collection fees. The definition specifically includes stormwater and confirms stormwater fees are not subject to the voter approval requirement, but rather the majority protest procedure.

In *Clovis Unified School Dist. v. Chiang* (2010) 188 Cal. App.4th 794, college districts challenged the State Controller's mandate claiming instructions that automatically reduced reimbursement claims by the amount the districts are statutorily authorized to charge students for health fees, regardless of whether the districts chose to charge the fees or not. The court held that "[to] the extent a local agency or school district 'has the authority' to charge for the mandated program or increased level of service, that charge cannot be recovered as a state-mandated cost. (*Clovis* at p. 812). The court reasoned that "this basic principle flows from common sense as well. As the Controller succinctly puts it, 'Claimants can choose not to require these fees, but not at the state's expense.'" (*Ibid.*)

The same reasoning applies here. Claimant can choose not to put a fee to the voters, or the voters can reject a fee, but not at the state's expense. Similarly, applying the vote-exception for stormwater fees confirmed by SB 231, a majority of property owners can protest and defeat a stormwater fee, but not with the result of creating a state mandate. Sufficient fee authority thus exists, regardless of political feasibility.

Further, Claimant has authority to impose property-related fees under their police power for alleged mandated permit activities whether or not it is politically feasible to impose such fees via a process that may be required by Article XIII D. Local governments can choose not to submit a fee to the voters and voters can indeed reject a proposed fee, but not with the effect of turning permit costs into state reimbursable mandates. Under Government Code section 17556, subdivision (d), claimant has authority to impose fees sufficient to pay for permit activities and they are not eligible for mandate reimbursement. Because SB 231 clarifies Claimant's authority to increase property related sewer fees and charges to recover any costs associated with the Trash Order, the Commission should reject the Test Claim in its entirety.

Sincerely,



ERIKA LI
Program Budget Manager

DECLARATION OF SERVICE BY EMAIL

I, the undersigned, declare as follows:

I am a resident of the County of Sacramento and I am over the age of 18 years, and not a party to the within action. My place of employment is 980 Ninth Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, California 95814.

On January 30, 2019, I served the:

- **Finance's Late Comments on the Test Claim filed January 29, 2019**

Water Code Section 13383(a) Phase I MS4 Trash Order Issued to City of Villa Park, Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, Effective June 2, 2017, 17-TC-22
City of Villa Park, Claimant

By making it available on the Commission's website and providing notice of how to locate it to the email addresses provided on the attached mailing list.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct, and that this declaration was executed on January 30, 2019 at Sacramento, California.



Lorenzo Duran
Commission on State Mandates
980 Ninth Street, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 323-3562

COMMISSION ON STATE MANDATES

Mailing List

Last Updated: 1/9/19

Claim Number: 17-TC-22

Matter: Water Code Section 13383(a) Phase I MS4 Trash Order Issued to City of Villa Park, Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, Effective June 2, 2017

Claimant: City of Villa Park

TO ALL PARTIES, INTERESTED PARTIES, AND INTERESTED PERSONS:

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Socorro Aquino, *State Controller's Office*

Division of Audits, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816

Phone: (916) 322-7522

SAquino@sco.ca.gov

Harmeet Barkschat, *Mandate Resource Services, LLC*

5325 Elkhorn Blvd. #307, Sacramento, CA 95842

Phone: (916) 727-1350

harmeet@calsdrc.com

Lacey Baysinger, *State Controller's Office*

Division of Accounting and Reporting, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816

Phone: (916) 324-0254

lbaysinger@sco.ca.gov

Cindy Black, *City Clerk, City of St. Helena*

1480 Main Street, St. Helena, CA 94574

Phone: (707) 968-2742

ctzafoopoulos@cityofstheleena.org

Allan Burdick,

7525 Myrtle Vista Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95831

Phone: (916) 203-3608

allanburdick@gmail.com

J. Bradley Burgess, *MGT of America*

895 La Sierra Drive, Sacramento, CA 95864

Phone: (916)595-2646

Bburgess@mgtamer.com

Evelyn Calderon-Yee, Bureau Chief, *State Controller's Office*

Local Government Programs and Services, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816

Phone: (916) 324-5919

ECalderonYee@sco.ca.gov

Gwendolyn Carlos, *State Controller's Office*

Division of Accounting and Reporting, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816

Phone: (916) 323-0706

gcarlos@sco.ca.gov

Daniel Carrigg, Deputy Executive Director/Legislative Director, *League of California Cities*

1400 K Street, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 658-8222

Dcarrigg@cacities.org

Annette Chinn, *Cost Recovery Systems, Inc.*

705-2 East Bidwell Street, #294, Folsom, CA 95630

Phone: (916) 939-7901

achinnrcrs@aol.com

Carolyn Chu, Senior Fiscal and Policy Analyst, *Legislative Analyst's Office*

925 L Street, Suite 1000, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 319-8326

Carolyn.Chu@lao.ca.gov

Michael Coleman, *Coleman Advisory Services*

2217 Isle Royale Lane, Davis, CA 95616

Phone: (530) 758-3952

coleman@muni1.com

Anita Dagan, Manager, Local Reimbursement Section, *State Controller's Office*Local Government Programs and Services Division, Bureau of Payments, 3301 C Street, Suite 740,
Sacramento, CA 95816

Phone: (916) 324-4112

Adagan@sco.ca.gov

Donna Ferebee, *Department of Finance*

915 L Street, Suite 1280, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 445-3274

donna.ferebee@dof.ca.gov

Adam Fischer, *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*

3737 Main Street, Suite 500, Riverside, CA 92501

Phone: (951) 320-6363

afischer@waterboards.ca.gov

Steve Franks, City Manager, *City of Villa Park*

17855 Santiago Blvd, Villa Park, CA 92861

Phone: (714) 998-1500

info@villapark.org

Susan Geanacou, *Department of Finance*

915 L Street, Suite 1280, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 445-3274

susan.geanacou@dof.ca.gov

Dillon Gibbons, Legislative Representative, *California Special Districts Association*

1112 I Street Bridge, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 442-7887
dillong@csda.net

Catherine George Hagan, Senior Staff Counsel, *State Water Resources Control Board*
c/o San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, 2375 Northside Drive, Suite 100, San Diego,
CA 92108

Phone: (619) 521-3012
catherine.hagan@waterboards.ca.gov

Heather Halsey, Executive Director, *Commission on State Mandates*
980 9th Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 323-3562
heather.halsey@csm.ca.gov

Sunny Han, Project Manager, *City of Huntington Beach*
2000 Main Street, Huntington Beach, CA 92648
Phone: (714) 536-5907
Sunny.han@surfcity-hb.org

Chris Hill, Principal Program Budget Analyst, *Department of Finance*
Local Government Unit, 915 L Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 445-3274
Chris.Hill@dof.ca.gov

Edward Jewik, *County of Los Angeles*
Auditor-Controller's Office, 500 W. Temple Street, Room 603, Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone: (213) 974-8564
ejewik@auditor.lacounty.gov

Jeremy Jungreis, Attorney, *Rutan & Tucker, LLP*

Claimant Representative
611 Anton Boulevard, 14th Floor, Costa Mesa, CA 92626
Phone: (714) 338-1882
jjungreis@rutan.com

Anita Kerezsi, *AK & Company*
2425 Golden Hill Road, Suite 106, Paso Robles, CA 93446
Phone: (805) 239-7994
akcompanysb90@gmail.com

Lisa Kurokawa, Bureau Chief for Audits, *State Controller's Office*
Compliance Audits Bureau, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816
Phone: (916) 327-3138
lkurokawa@sco.ca.gov

Michael Lauffer, Chief Counsel, *State Water Resources Control Board*
1001 I Street, 22nd Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814-2828
Phone: (916) 341-5183
michael.lauffer@waterboards.ca.gov

Erika Li, Program Budget Manager, *Department of Finance*
915 L Street, 10th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 445-3274
erika.li@dof.ca.gov

Jill Magee, Program Analyst, *Commission on State Mandates*
980 9th Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 323-3562
Jill.Magee@csm.ca.gov

Michelle Mendoza, *MAXIMUS*
17310 Red Hill Avenue, Suite 340, Irvine, CA 95403
Phone: (949) 440-0845
michellemendoza@maximus.com

Meredith Miller, Director of SB90 Services, *MAXIMUS*
3130 Kilgore Road, Suite 400, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670
Phone: (972) 490-9990
meredithcmiller@maximus.com

Lourdes Morales, Senior Fiscal and Policy Analyst, *Legislative Analyst's Office*
925 L Street, Suite 1000, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 319-8320
Lourdes.Morales@LAO.CA.GOV

Andy Nichols, *Nichols Consulting*
1857 44th Street, Sacramento, CA 95819
Phone: (916) 455-3939
andy@nichols-consulting.com

Arthur Palkowitz, *Artiano Shinoff*
2488 Historic Decatur Road, Suite 200, San Diego, CA 92106
Phone: (619) 232-3122
apalkowitz@as7law.com

Johnnie Pina, Legislative Policy Analyst, *League of Cities*
1400 K Street, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 658-8214
jpina@cacities.org

Jai Prasad, *County of San Bernardino*
Office of Auditor-Controller, 222 West Hospitality Lane, 4th Floor, San Bernardino, CA 92415-0018
Phone: (909) 386-8854
jai.prasad@atc.sbcounty.gov

Mark Rewolinski, *MAXIMUS*
808 Moorefield Park Drive, Suite 205, Richmond, VA 23236
Phone: (949) 440-0845
markrewolinski@maximus.com

David Rice, *State Water Resources Control Board*
1001 I Street, 22nd Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 341-5161
davidrice@waterboards.ca.gov

Brian Rutledge, Budget Analyst, *Department of Finance*
Local Government Unit, 915 L Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 445-3274
Brian.Rutledge@dof.ca.gov

Teresita Sablan, *State Water Resources Control Board*
1001 I Street, 22nd Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 341-5174
Teresita.Sablan@waterboards.ca.gov

Theresa Schweitzer, *City of Newport Beach*

100 Civic Center Drive, Newport Beach, CA 92660
Phone: (949) 644-3140
tschweitzer@newportbeachca.gov

Camille Shelton, Chief Legal Counsel, *Commission on State Mandates*
980 9th Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 323-3562
camille.shelton@csm.ca.gov

Carla Shelton, *Commission on State Mandates*
980 9th Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 323-3562
carla.shelton@csm.ca.gov

Natalie Sidarous, *State Controller's Office*
Division of Accounting and Reporting, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816
Phone: (916) 322-7453
nSidarous@sco.ca.gov

Hope Smythe, Executive Officer, *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*
3737 Main Street, Suite 500, Riverside, CA 92501-3348
Phone: (951) 782-4493
Hope.Smythe@waterboards.ca.gov

Eileen Sobeck, Executive Director, *State Water Resources Control Board*
1001 I Street, 22nd Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814-2828
Phone: (916) 341-5183
Eileen.Sobeck@waterboards.ca.gov

Jim Spano, Chief, Mandated Cost Audits Bureau, *State Controller's Office*
Division of Audits, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816
Phone: (916) 323-5849
jspano@sco.ca.gov

Dennis Speciale, *State Controller's Office*
Division of Accounting and Reporting, 3301 C Street, Suite 700, Sacramento, CA 95816
Phone: (916) 324-0254
DSpeciale@sco.ca.gov

Joe Stephenshaw, Director, *Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee*
California State Senate, State Capitol Room 5019, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 651-4103
Joe.Stephenshaw@sen.ca.gov

Derk Symons, Staff Finance Budget Analyst, *Department of Finance*
Local Government Unit, 915 L Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 445-3274
Derk.Symons@dof.ca.gov

Jolene Tollenaar, *MGT of America*
2251 Harvard Street, Suite 134, Sacramento, CA 95815
Phone: (916) 243-8913
jolenetollenaar@gmail.com

Evelyn Tseng, *City of Newport Beach*
100 Civic Center Drive, Newport Beach, CA 92660
Phone: (949) 644-3127
etseng@newportbeachca.gov

Brian Uhler, Principal Fiscal & Policy Analyst, *Legislative Analyst's Office*
925 L Street, Suite 1000, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 319-8328
Brian.Uhler@LAO.CA.GOV

Emel Wadhvani, Senior Staff Counsel, *State Water Resources Control Board*
Office of Chief Counsel, 1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 322-3622
emel.wadhvani@waterboards.ca.gov

Renee Wellhouse, *David Wellhouse & Associates, Inc.*
3609 Bradshaw Road, H-382, Sacramento, CA 95927
Phone: (916) 797-4883
dwa-renee@surewest.net

Patrick Whitnell, General Counsel, *League of California Cities*
1400 K Street, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 658-8281
pwhitnell@cacities.org

Hasmik Yaghobyan, *County of Los Angeles*
Auditor-Controller's Office, 500 W. Temple Street, Room 603, Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone: (213) 974-9653
hyaghobyan@auditor.lacounty.gov