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Community speaks out against accusations of insubordination in North Summit Fire District

By Arianne Brown, KSL.com | Posted - Feb. 12, 2022 at 4:12 p.m.



Former and current North Summit Fire District volunteers and community members are speaking out against accusations of insubordination after the district was suspended earlier this month following a fatal incident in North Summit County. (Megan Thackery, KSL-TV)

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week, issued a statement Friday to address [recent claims of insubordination](#).

The letter, which was addressed to residents of Summit County, informed residents of what firefighters and emergency personnel say is misinformation on the part of NSFD board members.

"There is not now, nor ever has there been any boycott," the statement reads, in part. "You know us. We are your friends and neighbors. We do our best to be upfront and honest. But we will no longer be bullied and maligned by the very people who were supposed to provide us with the tools and support we need to protect the health and safety of our community."

"Although we have been threatened with legal action if we speak out, we cannot, in good conscience, remain silent. There is too much at risk and our community is too important."

The claims of insubordination were made by Summit County Manager Tom Fisher earlier last week, following a fatal hunting accident in North Summit



Fisher said, "There is an organized effort by some of the firefighters to simply not take shifts. ... And they're doing that because they have some level of grievance."

In the same interview, Fisher said that the acting fire chief stepped down, telling members of the administrative control board who oversee the North Summit district that his firefighters were not filling the on-call shifts and were disobeying orders.

Fisher alluded to the [tragic hunting accident that took place on Jan. 31 in Summit County](#), stating that an "on-call firefighter decided not to respond," as a reason for the suspension of all NSFD firefighters.

Former NSFD employees are speaking out in support of the volunteer firefighters who were suspended, stating that the claims made by Fisher and his constituents are false.



2020, has been speaking regularly with members of the North Summit Fire District since their dismissal. In an interview with KSL.com, LeCates dismissed the claims of an organized boycotting effort due to grievances, or that firefighters were dismissing orders.

She said that when the call came in of a critical shooting, the one on-duty firefighter was left without resources to respond and wasn't dispatched immediately to the call during the critical response window. She said that this wasn't the first time this has happened.

"The day of the accidental shooting, Park City Fire District administration pulled North Summit's Ambulance out of service and sent the on-duty EMTs for a random drug testing in Park City," LeCates said. "This left only one ambulance to cover an area of 800 square miles, and that ambulance was located in Oakley. There was one NSFD firefighter on duty, and because the only available ambulance was in Oakley, the call was dispatched to South Summit."



realized the accident was in his area, he couldn't do anything because he didn't have an ambulance or medical personnel with him."

LeCates acknowledged what a terrible tragedy the accident on Jan. 31 was and expressed her sympathies to the family. She also said that it was a regular occurrence for the NSFD to be left without adequate personnel and resources to respond to emergencies.

Former Chief speaks out

Nelson served as the NSFD chief from July 2020 to Nov. 2021. He said that early on, he realized that there were many things amiss in the fire district, and he set out to correct them.

"When I was hired, I was told the fire department was a 'good ol' boys club,' and that I needed to fire the department," Nelson recalled. "What I found was the opposite. There was no insubordination, no 'good ol' boys club,' but I was met with a sense of community."



seemed to only worsen. He said that they had medical licensure for Emergency Medical Services but only one medical director that they shared with Park City fire until that was taken away.

"Every EMS agency is required to have a medical director who is a physician whose license we worked under," Nelson explained. "When our director was taken away, we could not legally respond to cases needing medical treatment; we could only assist in emergency situations."

Nelson said that in order to provide the district with medical services, he had to find a way for his district to legally provide medical care. So, he negotiated a deal with Intermountain Health Care in Park City at no cost.

"I contacted IHC Park City Hospital, and they agreed to provide this service to the NSFD at no cost," Nelson said. "This typically costs EMS agencies and \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year. We would need to secure our own, so I spoke to Utah Bureau EMS and they said that we could have a new medical director."



is an Emergency Medical Responder level. This level, he said, is "so basic that the state won't even write protocols for them."

"EMR is the definition of first responder," he said. "They can provide CPR and very basic bleeding control. It is such a low level that there are only three fire agencies in the state that use that designation, one of which is the refinery in Davis County."

This was all to say that the license NSFD had to operate as emergency medical responders was basic, and they didn't have an official medical director to operate under, which is required by law.

Nelson said that a board member has publicly stated many times that it is illegal for NSFD to have its own medical director, which he says isn't true, and that he has several emails from the Bureau of EMS that state differently.

Not long after Nelson's pursuit to secure a medical director for his district, [he was dismissed as chief in Nov. 2021.](#)



What has been happening within the NSFD has affected community members like North Summit County resident and Tollgate City HOA board member Michelle Suiter, who said that she and many others have worked hard for years to have an adequate fire district to serve the surrounding communities.

"What has been happening with the fire department has been ongoing for years," Suiter said. "Back in 2013, [a group of residents from Tollgate, which is in North Summit County, petitioned to be annexed into the North Summit Fire District](#). Our taxes went to the department, and we were told that we would get a fire station. The HOA even sold three acres of our land under market value to build a permanent station."

Suiter said that while they have been able to build a temporary metal shed to house vehicles and supplies, she and other Tollgate HOA board members worked with former Fire Chief Ken Smith toward building an official station until Smith retired in June 2020.



momentum on the new fire station" but [died due to a tragic accident in August 2020](#). She said that hope for the new station was renewed when Chief Nelson was hired, but things declined rapidly after he was fired.

Suiter recalled a meeting in October 2021 with North Summit Fire District Chairwoman Michelle Anderson, where they were told there was no money for a new fire station. Suiter says this frustrates community members and taxpayers because now that the NSFD has been taken over by Park City fire, it is costing a lot of money that will go directly to Park City.

"Michele Anderson said in a meeting around Oct 2021 that there was no money for a new fire station," Suiter recalled. "She has also complained about having to pay NSFD firefighters ... it appears that Park City will be getting more funds than would have been paid to the volunteers."

In the [meeting that was held on Feb. 7](#), the Administrative Control Board voted to pay \$168,000 to Park City fire for fire services for the next 60 days, which

Firefighters 'want to serve their community'

Nelson said that board members shifting the blame to the volunteer firefighter for the incident on Jan. 31 and suspending all the firefighters doesn't show the whole picture of what has been happening.

"These firefighters are volunteering because they want to serve their community," Nelson said. "Most of these volunteers work for other departments. One is a nurse in the burn unit, and another is a nurse in the NICU. Many have been volunteering for close to 20 years. The board saying that they are insubordinate or refusing calls, just isn't true."

For now, members of the NSFD remain suspended, with Park City in control over the district for the next six weeks. In the statement released by North Summit Volunteer Responders, they expressed support to their colleagues at Park City who are charged with the task of covering the North Summit area while the issue is resolved.

Fire District who have come over to help cover the area at great duress to their own organization," the statement reads. "They are in an unfamiliar environment and we ask all members of our communities to show them the same respect that you have shown us."

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