

NORTH KITSAP FIRE & RESCUE

May 26, 2017

To the people we serve:

On May 18, a King County Superior Court jury rendered a \$9.5 million verdict against North Kitsap Fire & Rescue and in favor of the widow and family of Jason Foster. Mr. Foster was a 48 year-old Kingston resident who was involved in a fatality accident on July 4, 2014 with one of our fire engines. Several legal errors by the court contributed to the unusually-large verdict. Despite our deep compassion for Mr. Foster's family and our recognition of their profound loss, we will be appealing this verdict to ensure a fair process and to protect our valuable relationship with you, the people we serve.

It's important to note that the investigation of the crash did not result in the filing of any criminal charges. Furthermore, this tragic accident was unprecedented in our history. For decades, our well-trained professionals -- both paid and volunteer -- have been responding to calls and driving safely every day, without any significant incident.

Despite these facts, the Seattle jury awarded \$9.5 million to Mr. Foster's widow, seven adult children and one minor child. Our business is saving lives and property; we are not experts in the law. However, we strongly believe that the courts are a place where all parties deserve a fair opportunity to present their case, and to seek a just and fair verdict. Our attorneys have carefully reviewed the case and have concluded that the court's errors on key rulings denied this opportunity to us and our firefighters. Though these issues and the size of the award are factors in the decision to appeal, we are especially concerned about the verdict's potentially-damaging effects on your trust in us.

To serve you, we must have your trust. We've worked hard to earn it and, every day, we work to maintain it. We want you to be confident that, should the worst occur, you can count on our well-trained personnel to respond quickly, safely and compassionately. We want you to know that we're open and honest with you, and that we're careful stewards of the resources you provide to us.

The Fosters have suffered an immeasurable loss. We continue to do our jobs as we always have, but the crash and its awful consequences are never far from our minds. As many in our community already know, we try to do what we can to help grieving families in the wake of their losses. Due to pending litigation, we were prevented from extending our usual compassionate support to the Foster family. We make it our practice to be as transparent and communicative as possible. However, we have been constrained from publicly discussing the accident and from responding to stories in social and traditional media as completely as we would like. We will have to continue to operate under those constraints until the litigation has finally ended.

If you have a question or concern, please let me know directly. Call me at (360)297-3619. Send a message to me at smith@nkfr.org. Come to our Board of Fire Commissioners meetings on the second and fourth Mondays at 7:15 p.m. at our headquarters station near Kingston. We will do our best to answer your questions and respond to your concerns, to the full extent we are able to, under the present circumstances.

We are grateful for your support in the past, and thank you for your continued trust now and into the future.

Dan Smith
Fire Chief

