



March 16, 2021

Honorable Theodore C. Zayner
Presiding Judge
Santa Clara County Superior Court
191 North First Street
San Jose, CA 95113

RE: City of Palo Alto Response to 2019-2020 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report: Why Aren't there More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?

Dear Honorable Judge Zayner,

The following is the City of Palo Alto's response to the above-mentioned Grand Jury Report pursuant to California Penal Code 933(c) & 933.05 (a) & (b) to respond to the Findings and Recommendations listed below.

Civil Grand Jury Finding 1a: Recruiting

A lack of effort to recruit female firefighter candidates to apply for positions in Palo Alto, Santa Clara, and San Jose Fire Departments has resulted in very few female firefighters being hired.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City agrees with the finding. Further efforts to recruit female firefighters may increase the number of female candidates applying to become firefighters. Industry-wide there is an underrepresentation of females who consider firefighting as a career. Additional outreach and education on a career in the fire service could also raise the number of female applicants.

Civil Grand Jury Recommendation 1a:

Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Departments should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow their number of female firefighters. Individual plans should be developed by June 2021.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City will develop a plan to enhance recruiting efforts, but it will not be completed by June 2021 for budgetary reasons related to the pandemic. The extraordinary circumstances in 2020 required the City to implement a hiring freeze and reduce staff and community services. In addition, the Fire Department incentivized retirements of eligible firefighters to decrease the number of layoffs of firefighters. For fiscal year 2021-2022, the City anticipates a continuation of

the hiring freeze as well as making further service reductions in each department including fire services.

Civil Grand Jury Finding 2: Mentoring

Talent and knowledge are lost or wasted if organizations do not create a mentoring program. Mentoring potential recruits and firefighters currently is voluntary, loosely defined, and unpaid, which hampers recruiting efforts in the SCC Region.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City agrees with the finding. Knowledge transfer is valuable to teach our next generation of firefighters – to learn and be inspired. Mentoring programs can be a successful tool to prepare and teach potential recruits and firefighters. Mentoring also has personal and professional benefits on the mentor. City of Palo Alto Firefighters participate in internal and external mentoring of potential recruits and probationary firefighters.

Civil Grand Jury Recommendation 2:

Fire departments in the SCC Region should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs. Mentors should advise and guide potential recruits, new recruits, and current firefighters. Mentoring programs should include visits to local schools and organizations to demonstrate encouragement of female candidates. Individual plans should be developed by June 2021 by Mountain View, Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Departments.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The recommendation has been implemented. The Palo Alto Fire Department participates in both internal and external mentoring programs.

All City of Palo Alto probationary firefighters are provided a mentor through their 18-month probationary period. Mentors are experienced Palo Alto firefighters who offer guidance and training to probationary firefighters. Mentors are expected to meet monthly and are assigned to mentees for multiple reasons such as aptitude, shift, and availability. The mentorship of probationary firefighters provides an additional avenue for professional growth outside of their assigned Captain. Mentors help establish and reinforce best practices and encourage openness and candor. The Fire Department is currently updating the guiding procedures for the mentorship program.

Additionally, the Fire Department participates in external mentoring programs. In conjunction with the College of San Mateo, the Palo Alto Fire Department sponsors a one year Cadet Firefighter program.. The City's participation in this program is funded through the Fire Department's training budget. Until her recent retirement, the City's participation in the Cadet Program was run by a female Palo Alto Fire Captain. This program focuses on individuals who are interested in a career in Fire Service and allows Cadets to gain hands on knowledge and experience. Palo Alto's cadets for 2021 include 7 men and 2 women.

The Palo Alto Fire Department is also registered with the Firefighter Candidate Testing Center (FCTC) a program run by the California Joint Apprenticeship Commission. This committee is a labor/management commission that focuses on recruitment and mentorship of women who want to become firefighters.

Civil Grand Jury Finding 3: Opportunity for Promotion

Although there is an insufficient pool of women firefighters, the SCC Region fire departments are promoting women to management positions.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City agrees with the finding.

Civil Grand Jury Finding 4b: Accommodations

The Palo Alto Fire Department did not respond to the CGJ requested survey regarding information about their facilities.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City agrees with the finding. The absence of this information in the report was unintentional. Palo Alto Fire Department collected but mistakenly left this information out of the survey that was submitted to the Civil Grand Jury. At the time of the survey the data was the following:

FACILITIES	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Number of Fire Stations	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Stations with Accommodations for Women											
Separate Locker Rooms	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4
Separate Dorms	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Separate Restrooms w/Showers	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5
Stations Scheduled for Retrofit											
New Stations Scheduled										2	2

As indicated in the Civil Grand Jury Report, there were two new fire stations in progress at the time of the survey. In early of 2020, the City opened fire station #3 which increased our numbers in the areas of separate dorm locker rooms and restrooms with showers (see image below).

FACILITIES	2019	2020
Total Number of Fire Stations	7	7
Stations with Accommodations for Women		
Separate Locker Rooms	4	5
Separate Dorms	6	6
Separate Restrooms w/Showers	5	6
Stations Scheduled for Retrofit		
New Stations Scheduled	2	2

Civil Grand Jury Recommendation 4b:

The Palo Alto Fire Department should perform a self-evaluation of its eight fire stations and report on whether separate locker rooms, dorms or restrooms with showers for women are available and, where those accommodations are lacking, the City of Palo Alto should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The recommendation has been implemented.¹ The City is cognizant of the current state of managing privacy and honoring the privacy of all gender and gender identities. Our newer fire stations are built with this focus in mind and the City has the following approach for our stations after evaluation.

Station #8, located in Foothills park, has one restroom, two dorms, and does not have a locker room for firefighters. This station is rarely staffed. On a typical year, the foothills station is staffed for approximately 10 days over the fire season (a 4-5-month period) and usually with limited hours from 08:00 – 20:00 (8pm). Based on the recommendation, the Fire Department will submit a request for a review of this accommodation from the City’s Public Works Department.

The remaining station that does not have separate locker rooms is Stations #6, located on Stanford University’s campus. The City of Palo Alto has a contract for fire services with Stanford University and Palo Alto Fire Department personnel occupy a fire station on the university’s campus. Stanford facilities are not operated by City staff. Stanford facilities staff will be made aware of the outcome of the Civil Grand Jury Report and the recommendations provided.

Civil Grand Jury Finding 5: Work Environment

Although every SCC Region entity has a non-discrimination policy, the unique work setting of a fire department coupled with the low number of women in fire service presents out-of-the ordinary workplace challenges because they live together and rely on each other during life-or-death situations. These unique features of this workplace make it more challenging for women to report discrimination and/or harassment.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City agrees with the finding.

Civil Grand Jury Recommendation 5:

To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in the setting of a fire department, each fire department in the SCC Region should develop city- or county- approved plans that focus on the remedies to the challenges of the fire service workplace for women. These plans should be developed by the Mountain View Fire Department, Palo Alto Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department by June 2021.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The recommendation has been implemented. As described in the City’s Anti-Harassment Policy, the City believes that prevention is the best tool for the elimination of harassment. Harassment in the workplace is a nationwide issue and the City of Palo Alto is committed to taking all steps necessary to prevent harassment from occurring.

¹The Civil Grand Jury Recommendation 4b mistakenly states the City has eight fire stations. The City of Palo Alto only has seven fire stations: #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #8.

Steps to prevent and correct workplace harassment include affirmatively raising the subject through training and written policy, expressing strong disapproval of inappropriate conduct, and developing appropriate sanctions. In Palo Alto, employees are empowered to report concerns through multiple channels. Reports can be made verbally or in writing to their immediate supervisor, any supervisor within or outside of their department, a department director, and/or to Human Resources. It is the supervisor's job to be aware of employees' interactions in the workplace and enforce the City's Anti-Harassment Policy.

Reports of unwelcome conduct are thoroughly investigated and, where founded, appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination will be taken. Retaliation against a person bringing a complaint or participating in an investigation of a complaint is strictly prohibited. Because the City is committed to a workplace free from harassment of any kind, the City's Anti-Harassment policy sets a higher standard for behavior than is set by the law.

Civil Grand Jury Finding 6: Gear

Due to ill-fitting uniforms and gear, women are not on a similar footing as their male counterparts. Women should feel secure in their everyday uniforms and formal wear and, for safety reasons, have properly fitting gear when engaged in firefighting.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The City disagrees with the finding that the current uniforms and gear are ill fitting for women putting them on dissimilar footing as their counterparts. Firefighter day uniforms are unisex and are individually tailored to the firefighter at no cost to the individual. Personal Protective Equipment is also unisex and tailored to fit the individual. Other safety equipment such as helmet and gloves are unisex, customizable and come in a variety of sizes.

Civil Grand Jury Recommendation 6

All fire departments in the SCC Region should make correctly fitting uniforms for women available and ensure that a sufficient supply of firefighting and specialty gear is available in women's sizes at the time they begin work. This plan for procurement should be implemented by June 2021 by Mountain View Fire Department, Palo Alto Fire Department, Santa Clara County, Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department.

City of Palo Alto Response:

The recommendation has been implemented. The City provides and pays for uniform and personal protective equipment tailoring for each firefighter. Gear such as medical gloves and suppression gloves are unisex, customizable and differentiate by size. Safety gear such as helmets and suppression gloves are cumbersome and bulky by safety design; however, the City does offer a smaller less bulky helmet as an option for firefighters.

The Palo Alto Fire Department has in place a Uniform Committee which reviews all Personal Protective Equipment issues that arise. Through this committee, firefighters can request or recommend different styles of equipment for review. The Fire Department will encourage participation in the committee that represents the department's diversity.

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Tom DuBois

Mayor of the City of Palo Alto