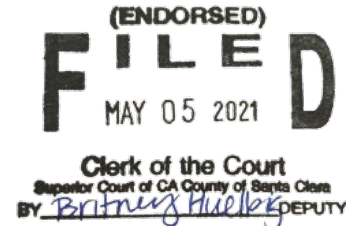


County of Santa Clara

Office of the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
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Megan Doyle
Clerk of the Board



May 5, 2021

The Honorable Theodore C. Zayner, Presiding Judge
Santa Clara County Superior Court
191 North First Street
San José, California 95113

RE: Central Fire Protection District Response to Civil Grand Jury Report titled "Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?"

Honorable Judge Zayner,

At the May 4, 2021 meeting of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors (Item No. 75), the Board, sitting as the Board of Directors of the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, adopted the response from the Fire District Administration to the Final Civil Grand Jury Report entitled, "Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?"

As directed by the Board of Directors, our office is forwarding to you the enclosed copy of the response to the Final Grand Jury Report. The response constitutes the response of the Board of Directors, consistent with provisions of California Penal Section 933(c).

If there are any questions concerning this issue, please contact our office at (408) 299-5001 or by email at boardoperations@cob.sccgov.org.

Sincerely,

Megan Doyle
Clerk, Board of Directors
Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District

Enclosures



April 27, 2021

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

Re: Civil Grand Jury Report: Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?

Below is the Santa Clara County Fire Protection District's response to the Civil Grand Jury Report titled, "Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?" and the findings and recommendations contained therein.

Finding 1 a: Recruiting

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

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: We agree that outreach to potential female firefighter candidates can be improved. Although we have conducted outreach to encourage potential female firefighter candidates to apply for positions with County Fire, we are increasing those efforts.

Recommendation 1:

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: Agree regarding the recommendation for a recruiting plan. Central Fire has begun the work and the timing requires further analysis.

The Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District (County Fire) agrees with the importance of outreach to potential female firefighters. And County Fire believes that the effort to increase female firefighter applicants should be an integral component of the Department's ongoing broader outreach efforts to increase diversity overall within the Department.

County Fire has made several notable changes in the past two years in an effort to increase the overall diversity of Firefighter applicant and candidate pools. These efforts include the addition

of a new Firefighter (non-engineer) classification that is now used for all recruitments moving forward, the reduction of the minimum age requirement from 21 to 18, the removal of the Firefighter 1 certificate prerequisite, a reduction in the probationary period from 18 months to 12 months, and the use of the California Joint Apprenticeship Committee (Cal-JAC) Firefighter Candidate Testing Center Statewide Eligibility List. County Fire made these changes because these requirements may have created unnecessary barriers to entry into the fire service. The first academy classes produced since the implementation of the above changes are the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 academy classes. These two classes have consisted of a total of 14 firefighters, including two women.

County Fire has also recognized and taken action to address the importance of front-end outreach to women and other underrepresented communities. For many years, County Fire has regularly attended career fairs locally and state-wide. Between 2016 and 2020, County Fire participated in eight career fairs and the NorCal First Alarm Girls Fire Camp, utilizing female firefighters as representatives at each event. Additionally, County Fire has been very active within our served jurisdictions with community education events such as fire safety and first aid presentations at elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools; and at community events where members of our Community Education and Risk Reduction Division present along with Firefighters. County Fire consciously tries to utilize a diverse group (gender and race) of instructors for these classes and considers these events as opportunities to promote the fire service as a career path.

County Fire also recently updated and modernized its career page on the Department's website, which includes a link to an article titled, "So you want to become a Firefighter," which was written by County Fire's Deputy Chief of Training and articulates the general steps to becoming a qualified candidate for firefighter recruitments. We maintain an active presence on social media with regular Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn posts. All of these efforts are targeted towards generating and increasing interest for women and men of all backgrounds in a fire service career and hopefully a specific interest in working for the Santa Clara County Fire Protection District.

Further, County Fire has an active volunteer program that currently consists of 13 men and three women. County Fire encourages and works with its volunteers to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities to potentially be strong candidates for future firefighter recruitments. County Fire provides qualified volunteers a direct path to the oral board process when Firefighter recruitments are conducted.

In addition to these efforts, we believe that more can be done to reach out to and develop a fire service career interest for women. County Fire has developed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee made up of nine members, three of which are women. County Fire has tasked the DEI Committee with analyzing the Department's current outreach efforts and researching and proposing new and innovative recruitment outreach concepts. County Fire has \$10,000 allocated and available to support the Committee's initiatives and is open to considering the allocation of additional funds if proposed by the DEI Committee. Starting in February 2021, the DEI Committee began meeting formally each month, and has received a full-day training on diversity, equity, and inclusion; implicit bias; and guidance for working together as an effective team. The DEI Committee has been directed to provide a research plan detailing their planned analysis and timeline to develop proposals for new recruitment outreach approaches by May 1,

2021. Lastly, County Fire will be providing a semi-annual report to the Santa Clara County Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation Committee detailing the demographics of the Department's filled positions. This report will specify the current percentages of female firefighters, female executive staff, and female employees; and provide similar data for employees of color. This semi-annual reporting will provide data for discussing the Department's outreach efforts to prospective female employees.

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: We agree that mentorship is an important component of an effective recruitment strategy and is integral to assisting firefighters promote within the organization. To date, County Fire has used both formal and structured mentoring programs and informal programs and found that the formal mentoring programs have not been demonstrably effective in aiding in recruitment and promotional processes or overall employee retention.

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: The recommendation has been implemented (and has been in place for over 25 years.)

County Fire has previously used both formal and informal mentorship programs to help develop prospective and current employees. Currently, County Fire is continuing its strong tradition of informal mentorship that is available to both prospective and current employees. The Department has also made previous efforts at creating a formal, structured and funded mentoring program. However, this program proved to be challenging to facilitate and was largely unsuccessful. County Fire's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee has been tasked with evaluating the findings and recommendations of the Civil Grand Jury related to mentoring and has been asked to provide a workplan demonstrating how the Committee will approach researching and analyzing County Fire's current approach to mentoring, as well as potentially creating a more structured, formal program. The Committee will provide its workplan related to this item by May 1, 2021.

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. No Recommendation

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: *Agree*

Finding 4a: Accommodations

There is a lack of gender-separate accommodations for bathing, sleeping, and dressing in fire stations in the Mountain View Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department, which can cause privacy concerns for all firefighters.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: *Agree*

Recommendation 4c:

Because Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District has 13 stations with no separate locker rooms for women, seven stations with no separate dorms for women, and four stations with no separate restrooms with showers for women, the County of Santa Clara should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: *To the extent this recommendation is directed to County Fire, it has been implemented in part, and is also in the process of being implemented more fully, as described below.*

Since 2019, County Fire has been developing a five-year Capital Improvement plan designed to provide facilities that meet projected staffing levels and account for a diverse employee population. This is identified in County Fire's Strategic Plan as a supporting objective. Best practices for fire station design promote gender-neutral and separate dormitories and restroom/shower "pods" to best meet the needs of station staff. Based on these best practices for fire station design, County Fire is moving forward with planning station renovations and upgrades that provide for gender-neutral facilities. It is County Fire's position that planning for those that may not identify with a specific gender best meets the needs of all.

Separate locker rooms may refer to the area in which station staff "turns out" into the personal protective gear to respond to calls for service. This turnout process is intended to remain in the apparatus bay to maintain standards for response time to calls, and to keep the turnout gear out of the living quarters to prevent inadvertent contamination from carcinogens. Locker rooms could also refer to the space inside the living quarters intended for station staff to dress in the station uniform or workout attire. This need will be satisfied over time through the implementation of private dormitories.

Of the seven stations lacking separate dormitories, two station rebuilds are funded and are expected to be complete in 2022. Two other stations are being designed to implement separate dormitories and gender-neutral restrooms. Construction for these remodels is expected to be completed by 2023. Of the remaining three stations, one is planned for rebuild design in 2024. Of note, County Fire is completing building modifications for a new headquarters expected to be complete in 2022. The building has been designed to include gender-neutral restrooms for all County Fire employees, including Firefighters who may be assigned to headquarters for two-year rotational assignments and special projects, and a Lactation Room as private space for those transitioning back to work following childbirth.

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: County Fire agrees with this finding to the extent it describes likely challenges applicable to many women working in fire service. County Fire respectfully disagrees, in part, to the extent that this finding is intended to encompass every situation.

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

County Fire takes equal employment-related issues very seriously, has demonstrated a commitment to training personnel above and beyond the statutory requirements, and has taken steps to promptly investigate and address fair employment issues when they arise. County Fire completed the required harassment-prevention training for supervisors under California Government Code section 12950 in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020 and provides harassment prevention training to new supervisors within 6 months of hire. Additionally, in October 2017, County Fire hired specialized trainers from the law firm of Liebert Cassidy Whitmore to provide training to supervisory personnel on Best Practices in Personnel Management, which included guidance on creating and maintaining appropriate work environments and reporting obligations related to harassment-related issues. County Fire has also required all supervisory personnel to complete training on the Department's policy against harassment, discrimination, and retaliation and acknowledge County Fire's policy each year since 2018. In addition, in 2020, County Fire began to have all non-supervisory personnel complete training on the organization's policy against harassment, discrimination, and retaliation and acknowledge that policy.

County Fire has also worked with legal resources to ensure that its policy against harassment, discrimination, and retaliation is up to date, legally compliant, and easy to understand.

Further, County Fire has taken steps to standardize the orientation and overview it uses prior to every interview process for all parties that may be involved, especially those that function in the role of assessors and hiring managers. This orientation methodically reviews the applicable

elements of County Fire's policy against harassment, discrimination, and retaliation and reviews key principles of implicit bias and common rating/assessing errors.

When issues arise related to allegations of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation, County Fire very quickly works to investigate the allegations and to address any substantiated issues, in consultation with subject matter experts and legal resources. County Fire also has a practice of utilizing external, attorney investigators to help ensure a neutral, unbiased approach to the investigation process.

This Recommendation and related issues will be referred to our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee for further review and research.

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: County Fire disagrees with the finding to the extent it suggests that County Fire's female firefighters have ill-fitting uniforms and gear; but County Fire agrees that women should feel secure in their everyday uniforms and formal wear, and have properly fitting gear when engaged in firefighting.

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.

Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

County Fire is currently participating in a joint fire academy with other agencies in the Santa Clara County region. When a candidate is provided a conditional offer of employment, they are sent to a fire station to try on refurbished gear. Our agency generally does not provide new turnouts to anyone until the end of their fire academy. The reason for this is that fire-academy activity is very hard on turnouts and at \$2,700 a set, it is not cost effective to provide new turnouts for our personnel at the start of the fire academy. However, all candidates have the opportunity to try on various sizes of turnouts during the new hire process and if there are no sizes that meet the needs of the candidate, new turnouts are sized and purchased to make sure everyone has adequately fitting protective equipment.

One of the goals of the fire academy is to build our recruits' trust in their personal protective equipment. Walking into a room that is on fire is not a natural thing to do. Doing so takes training to be able to operate in various temperatures, limited space conditions, and various positions (crawling, sliding, climbing, and descending ladders from various heights). With

respect to equipment, a candidate's ability to perform in a fire academy is mainly about acclimation to wearing heavy gear in high temperatures and confined spaces than it is about dexterity. However, if a recruit of any gender notifies Central Fire leadership that the recruit is finding it challenging to perform due to any piece of equipment not fitting securely or otherwise being ineffective, the recruit is provided with better fitting equipment.

With respect to firefighters employed by County Fire, County Fire disagrees with the portion asserting that women are not on similar footing to their male counterparts due to ill-fitting uniforms and gear. Towards the end of each fire academy, our PPE vendor is brought to the academy for sizing. All recruits are individually sized for turnouts and provided two new sets of turnouts before the recruits are released to the line for additional training. The structural turnouts are offered in four different cuts, including women's cuts (available to all genders). The recruit is individually fitted and provided with the best option for the individual. Turnouts must fit well for comfort, but they must also cover all areas well and provide enough room for individuals to maneuver in various types of situations in the course of their duties as firefighters.

County Fire already offers glove sizes from X-Small through X-Large. After County Fire surveyed several female firefighters, our PPE program manager researched other options for gloves to further expand available glove sizes, including ordering smaller sized gloves to evaluate for a better fit for all employees with smaller hands.

County Fire purchases all Class A and B uniforms from Summit Uniform in San Jose. County Fire uses the Workrite brand of Nomex uniforms. These uniforms are available in multiple cuts depending on the body shape of our employees. Prior to an employee starting work for County Fire, the employee is fitted for their uniform by the professionals at Summit Uniform. Summit Uniform also offers a full tailoring service to make sure the uniforms fit each employee well. Within a paramilitary organization like County Fire, it is imperative that all uniformed personnel are provided with the same, well-fitted uniforms to ensure the employees are dressed like the professionals that they are and can be readily identified during emergent situations and at other times. With various sizes and cuts of the Workrite uniform as well as the tailor shop at our vendor, County Fire is providing all employees access to well-fitting uniforms in Class A and Class B styles.

Summit Uniform also carries various brands of station boots in addition to the boots offered by our other vendors, All Star Fire Equipment and LN Curtis. We carry a large variety of options and sizes because County Fire realizes that feet come in all sizes regardless of gender.

Should there be any questions or need for clarification related to the above response, please contact Doug Baker, Director of Personnel Services at doug.baker@sccfd.org.

Sincerely,



Brian Glass
Acting Fire Chief