



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Robert Sapien, Jr.

**SUBJECT:** See Below

**DATE:** August 18, 2025

Approved

Date:

8/29/25

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** Citywide

**SUBJECT:** Response to Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report Entitled  
*"Turning up the Heat: Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in  
the San José Fire Department"*

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Approve the San José Fire Department's response to the June 16, 2025, Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury report entitled, *"Turning up the Heat: Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in the San José Fire Department."*

## **SUMMARY AND OUTCOME**

Approval of this report will satisfy the requirement of Penal Code Section 933(c), which requires the City Council to respond to the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury final report within 90 days with the City of San José's (City) response to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations. The Grand Jury transmitted its final report to the City on June 16, 2025, with an accompanying letter indicating that the City's response would be due by Monday, September 15, 2025. Once approved by City Council, the City Attorney will transmit the City's response to the Honorable Julie A. Emede, Presiding Judge, Santa Clara County Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara.

## **BACKGROUND**

On December 17, 2020, the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury released its report entitled, *"Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?"*<sup>1</sup> which contained findings and recommendations related to women and their recruitment and

<sup>1</sup> <http://sanjose.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=67f47021-7765-46ae-adda-480379a02ce9.pdf>

career advancement, fire station privacy, and uniforms and personal protective equipment. The report required responses from four agencies in the county, including City of Palo Alto, City of Mountain View, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and the City of San José.

The City Council approved the San José Fire Department’s (SJFD) responses to the recommendations on March 9, 2021.<sup>2</sup> The SJFD has provided subsequent updates, as requested by the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury on November 12, 2021, and January 30, 2025.

On June 16, 2025, the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury released its report entitled, “*Turning up the Heat: Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in the San José Fire Department*” (Attachment) that contains findings and recommendations related to the SJFD’s progress on the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury Recommendations regarding recruitment and mentoring, fire station privacy, uniforms and personal protective equipment, and culture. The report required responses from the SJFD, the largest Fire Department in the region, but with the lowest percentage of female firefighters as mentioned in the 2019-2020 report.

The 2025-2026 Proposed Operating Budget supports 735<sup>3</sup> sworn positions in 10 rank classifications. Employees in these classifications provide essential emergency services, such as fire suppression, rescue, and emergency medical services to the community.

As of August 23, 2025, 680 of the 720 total sworn positions available were filled. Sworn employees that identify as female represent 31 (4.6%) of the total filled positions, with 647 (95.1%) personnel identifying as male and 2 (0.3%) declining to state. SJFD’s first female firefighter was hired in 1981 and the number of sworn female employees peaked at 43 in 2009-2010 and dipped to 17 in 2019-2020. Growth in the number of female firefighters began to stall in the mid-1990s and, given that fire service careers span approximately 25 years, ultimately trended downward to only 17.

Three significant changes have occurred that have impacted Firefighter Recruit hiring since the mid-1990s: (1) the SJFD began recruiting for licensed paramedics in addition to Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), (2) possession of an EMT certification became a minimum qualification, and (3) the number of EMT certified positions in the SJFD decreased.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://sanjose.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=32550ff2-8e40-4a97-bd80-e727272c49c5.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The FY 2025-2026 Proposed Operating Budget includes 15.0 new sworn positions that will not be reflected in the SJFD’s vacancy reports until October 2025 and March 2026, respectively.

In 1994, the SJFD began recruiting licensed paramedics as it started providing advanced life support services. Prior to that change, no emergency medical certifications or licenses were required at the time someone applied. The paramedic applicant pool was significantly smaller than the entry level applicant pool. As the City began hiring licensed paramedics, Firefighter-Paramedics displaced one Firefighter-EMT position on each fire company, and subsequent recruitments have focused largely on hiring licensed paramedics. Presently, of the 267 authorized Firefighter positions, 173 are designated as Firefighter Paramedic and 94 as Firefighter EMT.

Possession of an EMT certification was added as a minimum qualification requirement for Firefighter Recruit applicants as advanced life support services began and EMT training ceased to be a part of the Firefighter Recruit Academy. Increasing firefighter job complexity demanded more Firefighter Recruit Academy training time. The elimination of the full EMT curriculum allowed the SJFD to adjust to expanding firefighter training requirements without extending academy length. In 2011-2012, the minimum staffing of truck companies was reduced from five to four resulting in the elimination of 28 Firefighter (EMT) positions.

Paramedic recruitment and the EMT minimum qualification requirement significantly reduced the number of eligible applicants. Prior to these changes, any adult with a driver's license and a high school diploma or general education development equivalent could apply. From this point forward, applicants were likely already in the fire service or emergency medical services fields or already in pursuit of a fire service career. The reduction in the number of EMT certified positions resulted in fewer opportunities for non-paramedic applicants.

In the 2024-2025 Adopted Operating Budget, City Council authorized \$150,000 to the City Manager's Office of Employee Relations to support the hiring of a consultant to conduct an assessment of schedules, living arrangements, and other aspects of the Fire Department organization that may be affecting its culture and the recruitment/retention of a diverse workforce, including women. A contract has been awarded through an RFP process and the City is currently in contract negotiations with the vendor.

It is important to note that the SJFD has been advancing its Strategic Business Plan, which was approved by City Council on June 7, 2016. Each of the findings and recommendations provided in the Civil Grand Jury report align with goals and objectives contained in the approved Fire Department's Strategic Business Plan. The SJFD accepts the Civil Grand Jury report as an opportunity to focus and accelerate progress on existing Strategic Business Plan goals and objectives. On May 11, 2019, the SJFD convened various stakeholders to accelerate the advancement of Strategic Business Plan goals within its Sustainable Workforce focus area, including *Goal 1: Actively*

*recruit, train, and support a talented and diverse workforce*, with sub-objectives that included:

- Revitalize and re-establish department recruitment program and integrate it across all department operations;
- Partner with external and internal stakeholder groups to support recruitment efforts (i.e., affinity groups);
- Leverage youth development group relationships for introduction into the Fire Service (e.g., SJFD Explorer Program);
- Leverage entry level emergency response occupations for development and recruitment (i.e., EMS providers); and
- Establish a recruiting team that reflects the diversity of the organization/community.

Some of the recommendations from the stakeholder meeting were implemented in the 2020 Firefighter Recruit recruitment process; however, many others could not be implemented due to COVID-19 restrictions. As COVID-19 restrictions and limitations eased, the SJFD worked to advance recruitment and outreach initiatives and leverage new partnerships. Successes included:

- Serving on the California Joint Apprenticeship Women’s Commission, which provides mentoring tools for fire departments and organizes firefighter career expos;
- Participating in the Cal-JAC *Recruitment in the Spotlight* panel interview, with over 3,000 views, ranking the highest viewed Recruitment in the Spotlight video on YouTube;
- Being featured in the City’s #WomensHistoryMonth spotlight;
- Launching the *SJFD Path to Service* video series, highlighting the department’s diverse workforce and their journeys to becoming firefighters; and
- Sworn personnel participation in a broad spectrum of career fairs and community events.

## ***Recruitment***

The SJFD’s Human Resources/Employee Services Unit is comprised of 6.0 full-time equivalent employees, including 1.0 Senior Analyst, 2.0 Analysts, 2.0 Staff Specialists, and 1.0 Senior Office Specialist. This unit provides critical administrative and operational support to the SJFD across a wide range of functions. Core responsibilities include, but are not limited to, management of alternate work schedules, coordination of career fairs and community events participation, disciplinary processes, education and professional development program reimbursements, employee reimbursements, higher class pay, hiring processes, human resources liaison services, leave of absence

administration, payroll and timekeeping, performance management, and union/bargaining unit liaison responsibilities. The unit also oversees special pays, separations, subpoenas, outside work permits, public records requests, and supports signature departmental events such as the SJFD Women’s+ Boot Camp.

Of the Unit’s staffing, 1.35 full-time equivalent employees (0.30 Senior Analyst, 0.75 Analyst, and 0.30 Staff Specialist) are dedicated to recruitment functions. This work encompasses sworn, non-sworn, uniformed, and civilian classifications.

The SJFD Women’s+ Boot Camp, now in its sixth year, continues to serve as a signature outreach and recruitment initiative for the SJFD. The event is open to all women, including non-binary, gender non-conforming, and trans women community members. The program provides participants with valuable insight into the firefighter career pathway, including timelines, educational requirements, and the importance of physical, mental, and emotional fitness. This is accomplished through a simulated exercise program, candid and inspiring stories from SJFD female firefighters, and the creation of a safe space where participants can ask questions and learn more about the profession.

In the most recent 2025 SJFD Women’s+ Boot Camp event, the program expanded its capacity to host up to 100 participants while lowering the minimum participation age to 16. This adjustment broadened outreach to high school students who may be considering a career in the fire service. The addition of partnerships with organizations such as California Firefighter Joint Apprentice Committee and Fireline Fit (formerly Blaze of Glory Fitness) have enhanced the program by offering participants’ access to resources, training, and mentorship opportunities.

The SJFD’s Racial Equity Action Plan is committed to taking meaningful steps to ensure that recruitment and hiring practices reflect the SJFD’s core value of *Leading With Equity*. In March 2024, the SJFD convened a Racial Equity Action Plan: Recruitment and Outreach Committee (Committee). This Committee is composed of 12 sworn and civilian personnel, representing all seven bureaus: Bureau of Administrative Services, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services and Training, Bureau of Field Operations, Bureau of Fire Prevention, Bureau of Support Services, Fire Communications, and the Office of the Fire Chief.

The Committee’s objective is to develop recommendations that will help SJFD build a more diverse workforce through intentional outreach and recruitment. Its goal is to inspire community members to explore fire service careers by creating opportunities for direct engagement with the SJFD.

The Committee’s work focuses on designing an engagement plan that connects SJFD personnel with San José’s diverse communities. This includes sharing personal career experiences, inspiring interest in fire service professions, and providing career guidance. To date, the Committee has recommended and implemented several impactful changes, including:

- Diversifying panelists for firefighter recruit oral boards;
- Randomizing interview lists to reduce panelist-rating bias; and
- Providing unconscious bias training for all oral board panelists.

Next steps include soliciting interest from SJFD personnel to establish a recruitment/public outreach representative list. These individuals will be aligned with career fairs, community events, and other public education functions, ensuring that SJFD representatives reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. In addition, a draft workplan is currently under review to assess feasibility, establish a timeline, and identify the resources necessary to successfully implement the plan.

In general, the SJFD establishes Firefighter Recruit eligibility lists once per year. The current eligibility list was established on June 30, 2025, with an application period that began on May 28, 2025, and ended on June 26, 2025. Application periods are open for approximately 30 to 60 days and are advertised through multiple venues, including the Firefighter Candidate Testing Center, City Careers recruitment page, SJFD email distribution, EMT/Paramedic schools, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Nextdoor, and fire station banners. Additional recruitment outreach efforts leverage workforce networks through shared social media posts and through the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 230 and other affinity groups. Assistance from City Council Offices is also solicited to leverage their community reach. Each applicant is asked how they learned of the recruitment and outreach efforts are refined based upon their responses.

The minimum qualifications for the Firefighter Recruit classification include a minimum age of 18, a valid driver’s license, a high school diploma or equivalent, a current Candidate Physical Agility Test card, and EMT certification. In 2020, applications were accepted without the requirement of Candidate Physical Agility Test, EMT certification or paramedic license to allow newly interested applicants time to meet minimum qualifications for placement. This change was derived from the Recruitment Stakeholder meeting held in May 2019, and was particularly helpful because of access limitations to courses and Candidate Physical Agility Test resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This process has since changed, and applications are again required to have both a valid Candidate Physical Agility Test card, and a valid EMT and paramedic license at the time of application.

While the California Constitution prohibits the City from granting preferential treatment to any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in

the operation of public employment, the City conducts various outreach efforts to attract a diverse pool of applicants. For example, to inspire more women to pursue fire service careers, the SJFD conducted Women’s + Boot Camp events on May 18, 2019, March 7, 2020, May 14, 2022, June 10, 2023, May 18, 2024, and May 17, 2025. These events invited interested women, including non-binary, gender non-conforming, and trans women community members, to hear about fire service career opportunities directly from professional female firefighters, participate in exercises emulating the physical demands of firefighting, and to establish professional networks and mentoring relationships.

In the most recent recruitment cycle, which closed on June 26, 2025, a total of 1,334 applications were received. Of these, 1,033 applicants met the minimum qualifications and were invited to complete personal history questionnaires – to which 805 applicants completed the personal history questionnaires, and 29 (or 3.6%) identified as female applicants.

These results are fairly consistent with data from prior years. As shown in Table 1, which summarizes recruitment outcomes over the last six fiscal years (2020–2021 through 2025–2026, August 2025).

**Table 1: Firefighter Recruit Applications**

	<b>Applications Received</b>	<b>Total Female</b>	<b>Met Minimum Qualifications</b>	<b>Total Female</b>	<b>Completed Personal History Questionnaire</b>	<b>Total Female</b>
<b>2020-2021</b>	1,135	80	1,135	80	1,015	80
<b>2021-2022</b>	1,114	76	1,114	76	1,000	71
<b>2022-2023</b>	1,426	69	1,426	44	569	60
<b>2023-2024</b>	230*	15	156	8	138	8
<b>2024-2025</b>	2,637	106	1,930	58	1,658	55
<b>2025-2026</b>	1,334	50	1,033	33	805	29

\*Applications represent solicitation for paramedics.

***Fire Station Privacy***

The SJFD presently operates from 34 fire stations. The newest fire stations provide single person privacy accommodations including sleeping quarters, bathrooms, and locker access. The oldest fire stations were built with common space dormitories, bathrooms, and locker rooms. Modifications intended to provide for greater privacy have been completed at all older fire stations. The extent of modifications in some cases was limited by building design, available space, and cost. Specific fire station privacy policies are contained in each Fire Station Procedures Manual.

Table 2 below describes privacy arrangements at each fire station. Lock-out privacy indicates areas that are shared by males or females and can be locked when in use. Exclusive male/female areas are those that are not shared by both sexes. Common areas include open dormitories that provide partial wall separation between individual sleep areas. Recent modifications replaced the five-foot-tall cubicle-style dividers with semi-permanent finished walls that are six foot tall and provide enhanced audio and visual privacy.

**Table 2: Fire Station Privacy Arrangements**

<b>Fire Stations</b>	<b>Bathrooms</b>	<b>Locker/Dressing Room</b>	<b>Sleeping Quarters</b>
2, 11, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23**, 24, 25, 27, 28, 33*, 34, 35,37	Lock-out privacy	Lock-out privacy	Lock-out privacy
7, 31	Exclusive male/female areas	Exclusive male/female areas	Lock-out privacy
3, 5	Exclusive male/female areas	Exclusive male/female areas	Exclusive male/female areas
4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, 30	Exclusive male/female areas	Exclusive male/female areas	Common area – 6’ semi-permanent walls
29***	Exclusive male/female areas	Exclusive male/female areas	Common area – 5’ cubicle-style walls
8**	Lock-out privacy	Exclusive male/female areas	Common area – 5’ cubicle-style walls

\*Fire Station 33 is currently closed.

\*\*Fire Stations 8 and 23 are programmed for relocation and replacement under Measure T Disaster Preparedness, Public Safety and Infrastructure Bond.

\*\*\*Fire Station 29 updates are underway and expected to be completed by end of 2025.

***Uniforms and Personal Protective Equipment***

The SJFD specifies uniform and personal protective equipment standards. Some components of uniforms are provided by the SJFD and others must be purchased by the employee with a provided uniform allowance. Class A uniforms are wool dress uniforms for ceremonies, presentations or other special occasions. Class B uniforms are



fire resistive “Nomex” garments worn daily while personnel are on duty. Physical training wear is required for personnel when they participate in daily mandatory physical fitness activities. Personal protective equipment includes structure firefighting turnout ensembles, wildland firefighting ensembles, emergency medical service jackets, helmets, gloves, footwear, and flash hoods. The SJFD provides custom tailored turnout ensembles and offers vendor available ranges of sizes for other items. Employees reporting fit issues are assisted directly by SJFD staff.

The SJFD conducted research and development (utilizing a core group of female firefighters) to identify a more athletic fitting structural firefighting coat and pant set that provides greater flexibility through the utilization of more panels of material that offer enhanced movement and articulation. These turnouts are less bulky with additional elasticized panels offering increased mobility and a more athletic fit at the waist. As legacy turnouts reach the end of service life, these newer athletic-style turnouts are issued as replacements. Newly hired recruits receive these newer athletic-style turnouts when they graduate from the Firefighter Recruit Academy.

The SJFD continues to conduct research and development on the following protective equipment:

- Cadet sized structural firefighting gloves, which provides improved dexterity for smaller hands; and
- Wildland firefighting brush coats and dual-compliant pants that offer women's sizes/cuts.

## ***Culture***

The SJFD is a community where Family, Integrity and Trust are highly regarded and rewarded, also known as “San José F.I.T.” Personnel in the SJFD are customer-oriented, respect each other, and have fun at work. To achieve “F.I.T.” ness, all personnel are expected to:

- Balance tradition with innovation;
- Rely on the strengths of teamwork;
- Value and advance diversity;
- Provide a safe, respectful, and courteous work environment; and
- Commit to continuous improvement.

All individuals that represent SJFD are expected to model integrity, professionalism, trust, compassion, and pride in all situations, on and off duty.

In January 2024, the City introduced paid parental leave for sworn personnel, providing up to 448 hours of paid time off and the ability to use up to 168 hours of available sick leave following eligible births, adoptions, or foster care placements. In addition, in July

2024, the SJFD Implemented a flexible scheduling to allow any firefighter to request a 24-hour shift schedule (as opposed to a 48-hour schedule) for family reasons.

The SJFD is also committed to ensuring all personnel are compliant with mandatory City trainings, which include:

- Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment (Supervisor): California state law requires that all employees in classifications with the ability to lead or supervise participate in a two-hour Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment training session every two years and within six months of being hired or promoted into a supervisory/lead classification;
- Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment (Non-Supervisor): California state law requires all non-supervisory employees to complete a minimum of one hour of Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment training near the start of their employment and then every two years thereafter;
- Workplace Violence Prevention Program Training: provides essential guidance on identifying warning signs of workplace violence, understanding roles in prevention, and knowing how to report concerns; and
- Racial and Social Equity Training: includes tools to foster a welcoming workplace, understanding bias and how it can show up in the workplace and more.

In July 2024, all SJFD personnel also completed a mandatory professional standard training. This training reinforced the importance of a culture that adheres rules and regulations as opposed to a culture that is indifferent to rules and appropriate behavior, everyone’s responsibility to hold themselves and others accountable, examples of behavior that have resulted in termination of fire personnel nationwide, reputational harm done to the SJFD when off-duty misconduct becomes a problem, and the importance of trust and honesty.

## **ANALYSIS**

The Civil Grand Jury report contained five findings and six associated recommendations, which require responses from the City. California Penal Code Section 933.05(a) and (b) states that the responding person or entity shall provide certain basic information in the response to each finding and recommendation. Regarding the findings, respondent(s) must indicate whether they agree or disagree wholly. When disagreeing, in whole or in part, the respondent(s) must specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons. Regarding recommendations, respondent(s) must state whether recommendation(s)

has been implemented, has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future (with a timeframe), requires further analysis (with an explanation), or will not be implemented (with an explanation). The following are Civil Grand Jury findings, recommendations, and the respective SJFD responses.

**FINDING #1**

*The SJFD has made progress in some areas since the 2020 Civil Grand Jury Report, which the Civil Grand Jury commends.*

**Agree.**

**RECOMMENDATION #1**

*No recommendation*

**Not Applicable.**

**FINDING #2**

*The SJFD is still struggling to hire and recruit more women.*

**Agree.** According to 2020 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, females represented approximately 4.4% of professional firefighters nationally. Since 2020, females have represented 10.73% of firefighters hired in SJFD, resulting in female representation of 4.6% of firefighters. While the SJFD has found success in building a more diverse applicant pool, qualified female applicant numbers remain far below actual population representation.

**RECOMMENDATION #2a**

*The City should dedicate more resources to SJFD recruiting more women, including increasing staffing resources currently dedicated to SJFD recruiting. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.*

**Requires further analysis.** The City allocated funding for the SJFD to work with Matrix Consulting Group to develop a strategic plan to improve diversity, recruitment, outreach, and retention practices. This work was initiated in June 2025 and with the draft plan expected to be presented to SJFD by the end of 2025. Implementation of the plan’s initiatives will require dedicated focus that cannot be absorbed by existing personnel without affecting recruitment efforts. To address this and prepare for implementation, the SJFD will require an additional resource in the Human Resources/Employee Services unit to manage the program, which will provide the Senior Analyst with more bandwidth to focus on recruitment efforts, specifically related to women in the fire service. Allocation of additional budget resources for this item will be evaluated through the budget process, in the context of the City’s overall fiscal condition and other departmental program needs.

#### RECOMMENDATION #2b

*The City should provide additional funding for the Women’s+ Boot Camp to host monthly drop-in work outs with the goal of creating a continuously building pipeline for potential applications. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.*

**Requires further analysis.** The City allocated funding for the SJFD to work with Matrix Consulting Group to develop a strategic plan to enhance diversity, recruitment, outreach, and retention practices. This work was initiated in June 2025, with the draft plan expected to be presented to SJFD by the end of 2025. Allocation of additional budget resources for the implementation of monthly drop-in workouts will be evaluated through the budget process, in the context of the City’s overall fiscal condition and other departmental program needs. Plan development, logistical coordination, and cost estimates for staffing and equipment will be available by September 30, 2025, to determine the feasibility of implementing this recommendation.

#### FINDING #3

*The SJFD has knowledgeable employees who could provide the administration and HR with ideas for ways to interest more members of underrepresented groups in attending paramedic school and/or pursuing careers in the fire service.*

**Agree.** The SJFD employs 801 personnel from diverse backgrounds, inclusive of 680 filled sworn positions, 33 non-sworn uniformed, and 88 civilian positions across seven bureaus that are committed to the SJFD’s mission to serve the community by protecting life, property, and the environment through prevention and response. Through the Racial and Social Equity Action Plan, the SJFD collected scholarship information from more than a dozen local paramedic institutions to promote racial equity by coordinating with academic institutions, scholarship programs, and community outreach to attract a diverse paramedic workforce. This information will be incorporated into the SJFD’s recruitment and outreach efforts. The SJFD will continue to explore opportunities to engage personnel to identify ideas that expand access for underrepresented groups to attend paramedic school and pursue careers in the fire service.

#### RECOMMENDATION #3

*While the SJFD has an internal racial equity action planning committee of staff to focus on recruiting and outreach strategies, the Fire Chief should ask the committee to provide specific recommendations on how to increase interest and pipeline among women, particularly in becoming paramedics. The committee should seek input from other sworn staff members who may have ideas. The SJFD should provide direction to the committee by September 1, 2025.*

**Will be implemented.** The Racial Equity Action Plan: Recruitment and Outreach Committee was established in March 2024 and is comprised of 12 employees representing the backgrounds and experiences of SJFD and the community. The Committee meets on the third Thursday of each month, with the next meeting scheduled for September 16, 2025. The Fire Chief will meet with the Committee to discuss this recommendation and request support in identifying strategies to increase interest and strengthen the pipeline for women, particularly in becoming paramedics.

#### FINDING #4

*Five years after the first Civil Grand Jury report, the SJFD still does not have a detailed timeline beyond FY 25-26 for retrofitting or providing privacy barriers in the remaining stations that do not have dedicated dorms for women or individual sleeping quarters. The SJFD also does not provide regular public updates on its continuing efforts regarding properly fitting turnouts and uniforms for female firefighters.*

**Disagree.** As of August 2025, 32 of 34 fire stations have private or designated female locker rooms and bathrooms. This was accomplished by converting legacy fire station Officer Quarters into designated female locker rooms and bathrooms (Fire Station 3, 5, 10, and 30). Fire Station 8 is newly constructed with private dorms and bathrooms (scheduled to open October 2025). Of the stations that were originally identified as having no separate dorms for women: two fire stations converted legacy fire station Officer Quarters into designated female dorms (Fire Station 3 and 5); two fire stations converted one open dormitory to designated female dorms (Fire Station 10 and 29); and five legacy open sleeping dorms received privacy enhancements in the form of six foot semi-permanent finished walls being installed which created greater visual and audio privacy for individual firefighters. The SJFD continues progress on providing enhanced semi-permanent privacy walls at the remaining legacy dorm fire stations. The new Fire Station 8 is under construction and is estimated to be operational in 2025 while the construction at the existing Fire Station 29 is also slated to be completed in 2025.

The SJFD provides quarterly updates through the Racial and Social Equity Action Plan that is inclusive of the status of its continuing efforts regarding properly fitting turnouts and uniforms for female firefighters. These updates are posted and accessible via the City's website.\*

\*The Office of Racial and Social Equity's public-facing racial equity plans dashboard is temporarily offline while updates are being performed.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4

*The SJFD should add updates on installing privacy barriers in sleeping quarters and obtaining correctly fitting uniforms/turnouts to its regular monthly report for the City Council's Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee until it has achieved success. This should be added to the regular monthly report by September 1, 2025.*

**Implemented.** The SJFD agrees that regular reporting is important, however, information updates on installation of privacy barriers in sleeping quarters and obtaining correctly fitting uniforms/turnouts are provided quarterly through the Racial and Social Equity Action Plan and SJFD believes that frequency and reporting mechanism is more appropriate than the Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee that meets six times per year rather than monthly. The Racial and Social Equity Action Plan is inclusive of the status of its continuing efforts to create an equitable and private fire station living/sleep quarters for sworn personnel, provide safe and form-fitting uniforms and personal protective equipment for sworn personnel that is comfortable and customized based on individual needs. These updates are posted and accessible via the City’s website.\*

\*The Office of Racial and Social Equity’s public-facing racial equity plans dashboard is temporarily offline while updates are being performed.

#### FINDING #5

*The City and the SJFD leadership need to acknowledge that transforming the fire service culture must happen on a daily basis and be reinforced by captains at all stations and leadership at all levels.*

**Agree.** The SJFD is an ever-evolving organization where approximately 30% of its workforce is replaced every 8 to 10 years. Growth and development are constant with employees at varying career stages. SJFD is guided by its rules and regulations, policies and procedures, City policies, and long-established core values, which include high customer service standards, mutual respect, and joy of service. Individually, the SJFD’s core values are modeled by each SJFD employees through integrity, professionalism, trust, compassion, and pride. Career journeys are long, and navigating through time can be challenging. Continuous improvement, professional development, and alignment with values must be reinforced each day, individually and by leadership at all levels of the SJFD. For example, in July 2024, the SJFD provided department-wide training, which covered workplace behavior, supervisor responsibilities, accountability for and risk and consequences of behaviors, mutual accountability, fire service-related case studies, and tools for prevention and intervention.

#### RECOMMENDATION #5

*The City should provide specific annual training for captains on enforcing City and the SJFD policies related to a diverse workforce, promoting mentorship and professional development, modelling accountability, and encouraging open dialogue about the need for the SJFD staff to represent the community it serves. The first training should be created and completed by January 2026.*

**Implemented.** In July 2024, the SJFD provided department-wide training, which covered workplace behavior, supervisor responsibilities, accountability for and risk and consequences of behaviors, mutual accountability, fire service-related case studies, and tools for prevention and intervention. Each employee is also eligible to participate in the citywide mentorship program and the SJFD Senior Staff maintains open door mentoring throughout the year. A refresher training will be provided annually. SJFD is an Accredited Local Academy under the California State Fire Marshal’s Office, providing professional development courses that support certification tracks toward meeting minimum qualifications for promotion with SJFD ranks. The coursework equips prospective captains with foundational knowledge in the administrative and human resources principles and is reinforced by training SJFD specific information where policies, procedures, rules, and regulations are covered. The Racial and Social Equity Action Plan: Recruitment and Outreach Committee was established, amongst other goals, to ensure ongoing dialogue about equity and diversity.

## **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

The SJFD will maintain a workplan to address the five recommendations above.

## **COORDINATION**

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney’s Office, the City Manager’s Budget Office, and the City Manager’s Office of Employee Relations.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This memorandum will be posted on the City’s Council Agenda website for the September 9, 2025 City Council Meeting.

## **COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION AND INPUT**

No commission recommendation or input is associated with this action.

## **CEQA**

Not a Project, File No. PP17-009, Staff Reports, Assessments, and Annual Reports, and Informational Memos that involve no approvals of any City action.

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

August 18, 2025

**Subject: Response to Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report Entitled “*Turning up the Heat: Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in the San José Fire Department*”**

Page 16

**PUBLIC SUBSIDY REPORTING**

This item does not include a public subsidy as defined in section 53083 or 53083.1 of the California Government Code or the City’s Open Government Resolution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sapien, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Sapien, Jr.  
Fire Chief, Fire Department

For questions, please contact Robert Sapien, Jr., Fire Chief, at (408) 794-6952.

**ATTACHMENT:**

Attachment – June 16, 2025 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report: “*Turning up the Heat: Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in the San José Fire Department*”





2024-2025 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury

# Turning Up the Heat:

**Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in  
the San José Fire Department**

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*June 16, 2025*

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INVESTIGATION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Why the Fire Service is Different .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The SJFD Should Reflect the Community it Serves .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters: The First Civil Grand Jury Report .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Making Progress, Slowly .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recruiting and Culture: The Hard Stuff.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>REQUIRED RESPONSES.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>19</b>

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

## SUMMARY

The 2019-2020 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury) recommended that the San José Fire Department (SJFD) develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase the number of female firefighters. More than five years later, the City of San José (City) is only now hiring a consultant who will recommend a strategic plan to achieve a diversified candidate pool with a focus on increasing gender diversity.

The 2024-2025 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury) commends the SJFD for making progress and the City for committing money to hire external consultants, but gains have been slow.

The City and the SJFD leadership understand the need for the fire department's staff to reflect the community it serves. Now the City and the SJFD need to operationalize that understanding. Recruiting is only part of the battle. San José must also create a fire service culture that welcomes a diverse staff.

The need for change and the specific steps required must be clearly stated and understood by everyone within the SJFD and the City. Leadership must be relentless in creating a culture in which all members of the SJFD can thrive, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury recognizes that change does not happen overnight. The SJFD and the City have made some progress over the last five years, but the most difficult steps lie ahead.

## BACKGROUND

The 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury examined the staffing levels and recruitment efforts of nine fire departments in Santa Clara County and released a report titled “[Why Aren’t There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?](#)” Of those nine, the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury focused more specifically on four departments to geographically represent Santa Clara County (County). The departments were Mountain View, Palo Alto, San José, and the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District.

The report recommended four changes to increase the recruitment and hiring of female firefighters in the County:

- Create and fund a recruitment process for female firefighters,
- Ensure an unbiased hiring process for female firefighter candidates,
- Ensure an equitable working environment for female firefighters with properly fitting gear, appropriate living conditions, and opportunities for promotion, and
- Provide mentoring for prospective, new, and current firefighters.

Recent news reports have suggested that departments are still struggling to significantly increase the percentage of women in firefighting positions (Gutierrez, Bott, and Carroll, 2024; Gutierrez, Bott, Bozovic, and Horn, 2024; Gutierrez, Bott, Carroll, and Bozovic, 2024). Recognizing that recruiting, hiring, and retaining women in the fire service is a challenge nationwide, the 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury wanted to find out what progress had been made in the last five years.

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury decided to focus on the SJFD, the largest department in the region and the department with the lowest percentage of female firefighters in the 2019-2020 report. The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury was interested in whether the SJFD had increased its percentage of female firefighters over the last five years and how it compared to the three other departments studied by the prior Civil Grand Jury.

## METHODOLOGY

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury conducted interviews with multiple City and SJFD officials, as well as fire officials and advocacy groups in other jurisdictions. It reviewed reports made to city councils and studied statistics on department recruiting. The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury also reviewed work plans, salary surveys, and publicly reported data on hiring in addition to outside studies and literature on women in the fire service.

Updated data on percentages of sworn female staff was requested from the four departments that the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury focused on to determine progress made since the previous report. Sworn staff in a fire department refers to firefighters, captains, battalion chiefs, chief, and emergency personnel.

## INVESTIGATION

### **Why the Fire Service is Different**

Firefighting is not your typical day job. The work is physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging. It requires risking your own safety for others. Firefighters are always on call during their 48-hour shifts and the work itself is unpredictable.

They may be sweeping the fire station floor or grocery shopping at one point and dealing with a medical emergency or putting out a fire at another point. They experience regular sleep disruption and spend days away from family.

Firefighters live together, work together, eat together, and sleep at the fire stations during their shifts. They rely on each other for safety in ways co-workers in most jobs do not and they must work as a team. Station culture is hierarchical, and male dominated. The vast majority of firefighters in the United States are male (Fahy, Evarts, and Stein, 2022).

### **The SJFD Should Reflect the Community It Serves**

Currently, 49 percent of San José's population is female (United States Census Bureau, 2024), yet only 4.6 percent of the SJFD's sworn staff is female. The Civil Grand Jury learned that a fire department that more closely resembles its community is more likely to provide effective service to that community during both emergency and non-emergency situations (Turner, 2025).

### **Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters: The First Civil Grand Jury Report**

While acknowledging that firefighting is a male-dominated occupation, the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report cited the recommendation of the 2008 *National Report of Women in Firefighting* that women should "comprise 17% of the first responders' work" (Hulett, Bendick, Thomas, and Moccio).

To increase the number of female firefighters, the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury made the following recommendations to the City:

- San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow their number of female firefighters. Plans should be developed by June 2021.



## TURNING UP THE HEAT

- San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs. Mentors should advise and guide potential recruits, new recruits, and current firefighters. Plans should be developed by June 2021.
- Because San José Fire Department has four stations with no separate locker rooms for women, 14 stations with no separate dorms for women, and four stations with no separate restrooms with showers for women, the City of San José should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. This plan should be developed by June 2021.
- To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in the setting of a fire department, San José 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 June 2021.
- All fire departments in the Santa Clara County 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.

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury reviewed updates provided by the City through the end of 2021, at which time 3.7 percent of the department's sworn staff was female (Sapien, 2021), up from 2.4 percent at the time of the original 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report.

The majority of recommendations from the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report were still in progress a year later. For example, the SJFD stated at the end of 2021 that it would develop revised recruitment strategies for the next recruitment cycle in 2022. It reported it had conducted a privacy review of all stations and had developed a workplan focused on strengthening privacy in common area sleeping quarters. In addition, the SJFD stated that employee concerns about privacy were solicited through an anonymous survey.

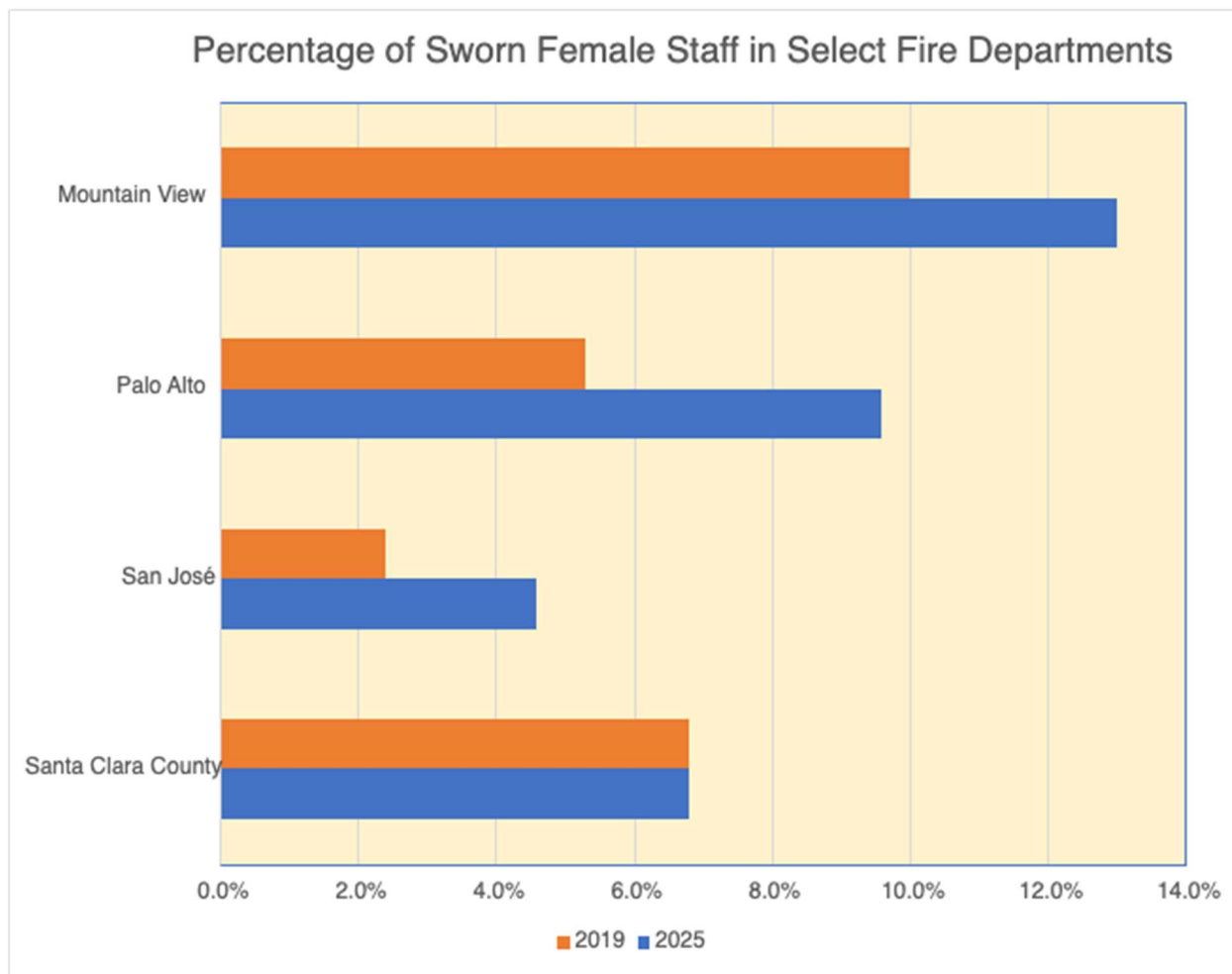
The SJFD said its overall workplan included:

- Strengthening recruitment efforts and resourcing,
- Continuing and progressing employee development and processes,
- Improving fire station privacy conditions,
- Adopting equity,
- Including methodologies in budgeting and program development, and
- Expanding gear and sizing options.

The SJFD also reported that it would add updates on recruiting and hiring activity, and marketing and communications to the City Council's Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee (PSFSS) starting in the spring of 2022.

## Making Progress, Slowly

Since the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report's findings, the SJFD has increased the number of women hired from 2.4 percent to 4.6 percent in 2025. Figure 1 shows the progress made by the four fire departments reviewed in the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report between 2019 and 2025.



**Figure 1: Percentage of Sworn Female Staff in Select Fire Departments in 2019 and 2025 (Data provided by individual departments).**

The SJFD has added a staff specialist to its administrative team with the goal of boosting recruiting efforts. The SJFD reports it has increased appearances at career and job fairs by 63 percent. In 2018, with the support of SJFD, women firefighters started a boot camp with the goal of expanding the number of female applicants for entry-level firefighting positions. The SJFD reports that it has since expanded participation in its Women's+ Boot Camp.



## TURNING UP THE HEAT

At the time of the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report, 14 stations out of 34 did not have dedicated women's dorms or private sleeping quarters for female firefighters. In early 2025, there were 12 that did not have dedicated women's dorms or private sleeping quarters. The SJFD reports it has identified options to retrofit them to individual dorms or semi-private areas by erecting six-foot semi-permanent walls and doors.

In 2023, the SJFD said it began providing custom fitted structural turnouts and helmets. Turnouts are the protective clothing firefighters wear when responding to calls. The SJFD said it planned to continue researching solutions for customizable uniforms and wildland turnouts. Wildland turnouts are used for outdoor blazes, such as wildfires and uncontrolled brush fires. Wildland turnouts are a problem that the SJFD has yet to solve since the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report.

The City issued a request for proposals in late 2024 for a consultant specializing in fire service recruitment to recommend a strategic plan to achieve a qualified diverse candidate pool, with particular focus on increasing gender diversity (City of San José, 2024). The contract was awarded to Matrix Consulting Group in Mountain View. Work is expected to begin later this year once the contract is finalized.

Additionally, as a retention measure, the SJFD has implemented flexible scheduling that allows any firefighter to request a 24-hour shift schedule for family reasons. Standard shifts are 48 hours.

The Civil Grand Jury acknowledges the progress the SJFD has made but notes that none of the prior recommendations have been fully completed. There is still much to be done to ensure that the SJFD has a firefighting staff that reflects the community it serves.

### Progress on 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury Recommendations as of May 2025

2019-2020 Recommendation	Results
San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow its number of female firefighters.	<b>Some progress.</b> The SJFD has increased the percentage of women on its sworn staff by 1.9 percentage points since 2020.
San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs.	<b>Some progress.</b> The SJFD has no formal mentorship program for current employees but continues to fund Women's+ Boot Camp.

## TURNING UP THE HEAT

2019-2020 Recommendation	Results
Because San José Fire Department has four stations with no separate locker rooms for women, 14 stations with no separate dorms for women, and four stations with no separate restrooms with showers for women, the City of San José should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters.	<b>Some progress.</b> Plan developed, but there are still 12 stations without dedicated women's dorms or private sleeping quarters, with no firm timeline for completion.
To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in a fire department, San José should develop plans that focus on remedies to those challenges.	<b>Some progress.</b> Consultant to be hired.
SJFD 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.	<b>Some progress.</b> The SJFD says it provides fitted structural turnouts and helmets.

**Figure 2: Summary of Progress on Recommendations from the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury Report.**

### Recruiting and Culture: The Hard Stuff

The SJFD has begun to tackle the easier and less controversial changes recommended by the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury. However, almost no movement has been made on remedies to the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive department.

#### **Recruiting requires strategy, staff, budget, sustained effort, and creativity**

The SJFD does not lack applicants for firefighter positions. What the SJFD lacks is a diverse pool of applicants that reflects the city they serve. This problem is not unique to San José and the Civil Grand Jury understands that the solution is more complex than simply hiring more women.

Firefighting is a male-dominated profession. Women today remain a minority in U.S. fire departments. In 2020, men accounted for 95.6 percent of all firefighters while women made up just 4.4 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

Recruiting, in any industry, requires a sustained investment. This is particularly important in the fire service because the process of becoming a recruit is a long one. In San José, applicants must first have a certificate of physical ability and a valid EMT certificate or paramedic license before registering with the Firefighter Candidate Testing Center (City of San José, Firefighter Qualifications, n.d.), and then moving on to complete a challenging 20-week, entry-level academy (City of San José, Firefighter Selection Process, n.d.).

Complicating the recruitment challenge is the fact that the vast majority of fire department calls now are medical calls. For that reason, there has been a growing need for advanced life support capabilities within the SJFD resulting in an increased need to recruit paramedic firefighters. However, women tend to be underrepresented in paramedic schools. In combination, the growing demand for paramedics, reduced supply due to the pandemic when paramedic schools shut down, and women being underrepresented in paramedic schools means the pool of women paramedics is extremely small.

## **Women's+ Boot Camp**

To address the challenge of attracting more women to the fire service, a female firefighter in San José created The Women's+ Boot Camp in 2018 and received support from the SJFD to host an event.

Now held once a year, the free, one-day boot camp is conducted by women firefighters and includes a question-and-answer session, a workout, and demonstrations of equipment and tools. The boot camp has been very popular and has expanded to allow 100 participants. The Civil Grand Jury commends the initiative of the SJFD's women for working to build a pipeline of potential recruits.

Enough time has passed that some former boot camp attendees have now been hired by SJFD and other Bay Area departments. Building on this success, the City could – for a small investment – host monthly drop-in workout sessions for women through the boot camp program. This could further expand the recruiting pipeline and build ongoing relationships with boot camp attendees.

## **Plans and Goals**

SJFD has no shortage of goals and workplans that reflect the need for a diverse workforce. In 2016, the City Council adopted an SJFD strategic plan, now known as Vision 2023 (Jacobson, 2016). That plan has five focus areas, one of which is a sustainable workforce. The first goal of the sustainable workforce area is to actively recruit, train, support, and retain a talented and diverse workforce.

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

Like other departments in the City, the SJFD also now has a two-year racial and social equity action plan, which includes an objective to achieve diversity, create equitable and private sleeping quarters for sworn personnel, and provide safe and well-fitting personal protective equipment, among other things (City of San José, Racial and Social Equity Plans, 2025). Each of those items were the subject of Civil Grand Jury recommendations in 2019-2020. Department equity plans were created in 2024.

Yet, these plans have resulted in minimal progress for SJFD.

Despite the City and the SJFD having the objective of achieving diversity for years, the City is just now hiring a consultant to provide a recruiting strategy with a specific focus on gender for the SJFD. This suggests that the SJFD either does not have an adequate strategy or that its existing strategy has not been sufficient. Further, the SJFD's equity plan indicates it will identify a recruitment outreach committee and develop a recruitment and outreach workplan in the last quarter of FY 2024-25. This is occurring five years after the first Civil Grand Jury report identified this need.

## **Insufficient Recruiting Staff**

Although the SJFD added a full-time position to its Human Relations team, there is still not one person in the SJFD who is dedicated full-time to recruiting. As discussed above, there are unmet recruiting efforts to improve the pool of female candidates. Given that the overall percentage of women in SJFD remains among the lowest in the county, this does not seem to be an adequate level of staffing and/or dedication of resources for the recruiting challenge at hand.

At least one administrative staff member should be devoted to recruiting full-time. In addition, building a diverse pipeline will require ideas from the SJFD's dedicated, experienced women firefighters who will have suggestions about how the SJFD can make recruiting inroads.

Unfortunately, recruitment is just one part of the challenge.

## **Fitting in Is Very Important**

When women join SJFD, there is strong pressure to 'go along to get along' and be part of the team. Women do not always feel empowered to speak up or try to change the culture given their small numbers and their fear of drawing attention to themselves.

It's difficult for any firefighter to leave once they join a department. The SJFD, like most California fire departments, typically requires experienced hires transferring from other fire departments to go through a new hire academy and start over at an entry level. This is a significant career barrier for any firefighter wanting to change departments.

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

To be successful, among other things, women who are part of the SJFD sworn staff need to:

1. Conform to the existing culture to be accepted and successfully advance,
2. Accept that the culture is male-dominated and hierarchical, and
3. Know that complaining can make you a target of discrimination and harassment.

That said, it is important to note that while women do conform, some are also actively, although quietly, working to change the culture and create a more inclusive environment for all firefighters.

## **Fire Station Culture**

The best aspects of fire station culture include among other things: commitment to training and tactics, pride in operations, camaraderie and teamwork, continuous improvement, and strong leadership (Eskwitt, 2021; Brown, 2025).

These positive aspects of fire station culture contribute to the overall effectiveness and cohesion of fire departments, enabling them to provide excellent service to their communities.

The Civil Grand Jury learned that there are other aspects that are not as positive. The masculine culture can be challenging for women. Women still do not have separate sleeping quarters or bathrooms in some stations. This compromises their privacy. Bad behavior is not always called out or addressed by ranking staff when it occurs in front of them. Not all women feel comfortable raising concerns.

The good news is that the aspects of a healthy fire station culture are not in conflict with a culture that is welcoming for women.

## **Creating Change – Looking Beyond Facilities and Uniforms**

To change its culture and make it more comfortable for women, the SJFD can implement any number of strategies, including:

- fostering a culture where all team members feel safe expressing ideas and concerns,
- providing equitable training and development opportunities,
- focusing on recruitment,
- encouraging qualified women to pursue promotions, and
- ensuring women have trusted leaders they can talk to (Pieper, 2018; Hanifan, 2020; Turner, 2025).

San José fire captains can play a pivotal role in shaping and transforming firehouse culture for everyone—and this influence is especially important for women at the SJFD. The captains can do this by:

- setting the tone at the station,

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

- enforcing department policies,
- promoting mentorship and professional development,
- driving team cohesion,
- modeling accountability, and
- encouraging open dialogue (StreetWise, 2023; Fleeup, 2024; Fire Force, 2023).

## **Another Consultant**

The Civil Grand Jury learned that the City intends to re-issue a request for proposals for a second consultant who will examine living arrangements, schedule, and other issues that may affect culture and recruitment of a diverse workforce, including women. The City Manager's Office will manage the consultant once a contract is completed.

## **Bottom Line**

Culture within SJFD needs to improve. Senior leadership can set the tone at the top, but it will be the captains who make the change happen. The captains are instrumental in making the SJFD firehouses more inclusive and supportive for women. The captains need to call out any bad behavior that could make any team member uncomfortable. They need to ensure that everyone is treated with respect. Their positive influence will encourage other firefighters to follow suit, drive structural improvements, and help cultivate a resilient, respectful team environment in which all firefighters can thrive.

## CONCLUSION

The Civil Grand Jury found that while the SJFD has made progress in addressing the less complex recommendations made in the 2019-2020 report about women firefighters, there is significant room for improvement in the more challenging areas of recruiting and culture.

Programs such as the Women's+ Boot Camp and informal mentors are a good start, but women should be at the table where decisions are made to provide their input and perspectives on the workplace, recruiting, and culture.

Being a firefighter is a unique career, a calling that is in service to the community. Communities benefit most when they are served by individuals whose diverse backgrounds and experience mirror the population. In San José, women make up nearly half the population, yet they make up less than 5 percent of the SJFD's sworn staff. The Civil Grand Jury understands that firefighting is a tough job and that there is a long-held image of what a firefighter looks like and does. But if you can't see it, you can't be it (Marques, 2022).

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Finding 1

The SJFD has made progress in some areas since the 2020 Civil Grand Jury Report, which the Civil Grand Jury commends.

### Recommendation 1

No recommendation.

### Finding 2

The SJFD is still struggling to recruit and hire more women.

### Recommendation 2a

The City should dedicate more resources to SJFD recruiting more women, including increasing the staffing resources currently dedicated to SJFD recruiting. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

### Recommendation 2b

The City should provide additional funding for the Women's+ Boot Camp to host monthly drop-in work outs with the goal of creating a continuously building pipeline of potential applicants. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

### Finding 3

The SJFD has knowledgeable employees who could provide the administration and HR with ideas for ways to interest more members of underrepresented groups in attending paramedic school and/or pursuing careers in the fire service.

### Recommendation 3

While the SJFD has an internal racial equity action planning committee of staff to focus on recruiting and outreach strategies, the Fire Chief should ask the committee to provide specific recommendations on how to increase interest and pipeline among women, particularly in becoming



paramedics. The committee should seek input from other sworn staff members who may have ideas. The SJFD should provide direction to the committee by September 1, 2025.

## **Finding 4**

Five years after the first Civil Grand Jury report, the SJFD still does not have a detailed timeline beyond FY 25-26 for retrofitting or providing privacy barriers in the remaining stations that do not have dedicated dorms for women or individual sleeping quarters. The SJFD also does not provide regular public updates on its continuing efforts regarding properly fitting turnouts and uniforms for female firefighters.

## **Recommendation 4**

The SJFD should add updates on installing privacy barriers in sleeping quarters and obtaining correctly fitting uniforms/turnouts to its regular monthly report for the City Council's Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee until it has achieved success. This should be added to the regular monthly report by September 1, 2025.

## **Finding 5**

The City and the SJFD leadership need to acknowledge that transforming the fire service culture must happen on a daily basis and be reinforced by captains at all stations and leadership at all levels.

## **Recommendation 5**

The City should provide specific annual training for captains on enforcing City and the SJFD policies related to a diverse workforce, promoting mentorship and professional development, modelling accountability, and encouraging open dialogue about the need for the SJFD staff to represent the community it serves. The first training should be created and completed by January 2026.

# TURNING UP THE HEAT

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933(b) et seq. and California Penal Code § 933.05, the County of Santa Clara 2024-25 Civil Grand Jury requests responses from the following governing body:

Responding Agency	Findings	Recommendations
The City of San José	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5

## GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

### **EMT**

An Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) is a first responder trained to rapidly assess, stabilize, and transport sick or injured patients using basic life support techniques.

### **Paramedic**

A paramedic is an advanced pre-hospital clinician who performs invasive procedures, administers a wide range of emergency medications, interprets cardiac rhythms, and makes complex treatment decisions to deliver hospital-level care at the scene and enroute to definitive care.

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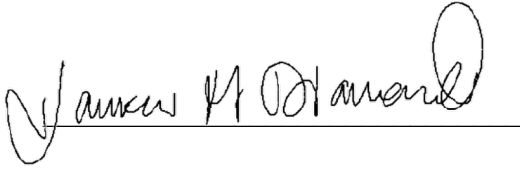
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# TURNING UP THE HEAT

This report was **ADOPTED** by the County of Santa Clara 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury on this 16th day of June, 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lauren M. Diamond", is written over a horizontal line.

Lauren Diamond  
Foreperson