



Memorandum

TO: PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE,
& STRATEGIC SUPPORT
COMMITTEE **FROM:** Robert Sapien, Jr.

SUBJECT: Fire Department Staffing,
Recruitment, Hiring and
Bilingual Services Annual
Report **DATE:** March 26, 2026

Approved

Date: April 7, 2026

COUNCIL DISTRICT: Citywide

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the annual report on Fire Department sworn personnel staffing, recruitment, and hiring activity, and bilingual services for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

BACKGROUND

The Department's mission is to protect lives, property and the environment through prevention and response. To support this mission, the Department deploys resources to provide timely and effective all-hazards response including fire, rescue, hazardous materials releases, and emergency medical services requests. The Department's geographical service area is 208.17 square miles, including 181.36 square miles within City limits and 26.81 square miles of area serviced by agreement between the Santa Clara Central Fire Protection District and the City of San José (City). The California Department of Finance estimates a city population of 979,415¹ as of January 1, 2025. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025, the Department responded to 111,372 incidents, approximately 1.2% more than the prior year.

Emergency response resources are deployed out of 34 fire stations, including six Battalion Chiefs, 33 Engine Companies, nine Truck Companies, one Urban Search and Rescue Company, three Rescue-Medic Units, and one Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Company.

¹ <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/estimates-e1/>

The Memorandum of Agreement between the City of San José and International Association of Firefighters, Local 230² specifies the following staffing levels:

- Each single piece Engine Company shall have a minimum of four line personnel.
- Each three piece Engine Company shall have a minimum of six line personnel.
- Each Truck Company or Urban Search and Rescue vehicle shall have a minimum of four line personnel.
- Each Battalion shall have a minimum of one Battalion Chief or person acting in the capacity per shift.

Additionally, the Squad Program Side Letter Agreement Between the City and the International Association of Firefighters, Local 230³ specifies that Rescue Medic Units will be staffed with two line personnel.

The resulting daily minimum staffing level for regularly deployed resources is 190 personnel working 24-hour shifts. To maintain the minimum staffing levels, position vacancies are backfilled by either available on-duty relief personnel or by off-duty personnel on an overtime basis.

Augmented Staffing Levels/Mutual Aid

The Department continuously monitors conditions and augments staffing levels to meet periodic hazards such as high fire danger periods (e.g., Red Flag Warning), flood potential, large events (i.e., sporting events), and significant incidents. During these periods, resources that best meet the forecasted hazard are staffed by relief personnel or on an overtime basis in addition to normal daily staffing. For example, when high fire danger is predicted, the Duty Chief⁴ may require additional personnel to staff wildland firefighting equipment such as Type 3 and/or Type 6 Engines that have four-wheel drive capability, and/or Water Tenders, which provide water sources in areas where fire hydrants are sparse or unavailable.

When resources are deployed for mutual aid assignments throughout the State of California, similar reserve resources are staffed by relief personnel or on an overtime basis to bring local coverage to normal levels. For example, when 22 personnel are deployed to a significant incident as a Strike Team, five Engines, one Strike Team Leader, one Strike Team Leader trainee, five additional reserve Engines and two Battalion Chiefs are placed into service with an equivalent number of personnel to provide standard coverage locally. This is to restore the daily local staffing minimum to 190 personnel. Deployments can also last for several weeks, with crew rotations typically occurring at 14 days.

² <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/40510/637068396204500000>

³ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/40520/637068396235430000>

⁴ Duty Chief: Any Chief Officer assigned to respond on a third and greater alarm calls and act as Incident Commander until relieved by a superior officer. Normally this is one of the Deputy Fire Chiefs.

Department Staffing Background

The Department reached its highest staffing levels in FY 2007-2008 with 758 authorized sworn positions. In subsequent years, the Department experienced substantial reductions due to budget actions as impacts of the Great Recession challenged City resources. The FY 2010-2011 Adopted Operating Budget⁵ then eliminated 75 sworn positions, resulting in the closure of Fire Engine 30, Fire Engine 33, Fire Engine 34, Fire Engine 35, Truck 3, and reduced the Hazardous Incident Team 29 from four to two personnel. After, FY 2011-2012 Adopted Operating Budget⁶ actions resulted in the elimination of 28 sworn positions achieved by the reduction of Truck and Urban Search and Rescue company daily staffing from five to four and Truck Company minimum staffing was reduced from five to four in the International Association of Firefighters, Local 230 Memorandum of Agreement. In that same year, the six remaining positions on the Hazardous Incident Team 29 were eliminated, and hazardous materials response was transferred to Truck 29. While many Department resources have been restored, Truck 3 and Engine 33 remain out of service indefinitely, and Truck 29 is placed out of service when Hazardous Incident Team 29 is committed to a hazardous materials response. The 2021-2022 Adopted Operating Budget authorized 719 sworn positions, which included 14 new positions for Fire Station 37 and the elimination of administrative Battalion Chief and Fire Captain positions. Incumbents were placed in vacant frontline positions that were replaced with non-sworn positions, and the FY 2022-2023 Adopted Operating Budget authorized 720 sworn positions. In FY 2023-2024 the Adopted Operating Budget added three Battalion Chief positions, allowing the deployment of Battalion 35 to improve field span of control and Battalion Chief response times. Additionally, three Fire Captain positions were eliminated, discontinuing the EMS Field Coordinator (Med 30) position in that same year.

2016 Fire Department Organizational Review

The Department first presented its City Council directed *Fire Department Organizational Review* to the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee on February 18, 2016⁷. The Organizational Review, conducted by Citygate Associates, LLC, included a community risk assessment and a Standards of Response Coverage assessment that analyzed Department fire crew deployment. The Standards of Response Coverage evaluated a variety of factors, including response time performance, effective firefighting force (resources) assembly time, call volume, and others. The recommendations contained in Organizational Review have since guided the Department's Strategic Business Plan goals and objectives and recommendations to City Council. On August 10, 2018, Council voted to place the Disaster Preparedness, Public Safety, and Infrastructure Bond Measure on the November 2018 ballot. The passage of Measure T enabled the City to address some of the gaps identified in the *Fire Department Organizational Review* Standards of Response Coverage analysis, including

⁵ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/50625/63715207493390000>

⁶ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/50645/637152094524730000>

⁷ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/18961/636683753806870000>

construction of new Fire Stations 32, 36, and 37. The Department anticipates that 42 sworn positions will be required to staff newly deployed Fire Engines 32 and 36 and Fire Truck 32 (12 front-line and two relief positions per fire station).

2023 Local Agency Formation Commission of Santa Clara County Countywide Fire Service Review

In October 2023, the Local Agency Formation Commission of Santa Clara County issued its Countywide Fire Service Review Final Report⁸ (Report). The Report offered 19 San José Fire Department Service Review Determinations, five of which related to staffing levels:

- **6-2:** According to the Association of Bay Area Governments, San José is projected to experience varying growth rates, depending on location within the City, of between 6% and 82% through 2035 and between 5% and 39% between 2035 and 2050. The most significant growth is anticipated in Superdistrict 9 (Superdistrict 9 titled North Santa Clara County in the Association of Bay Area Governments Plan Bay Area 2025: Forecasting and Modeling Report⁹ reflecting 199% household growth between 2015 and 2050).
- **6-4:** Based on unit hour utilization (UHU) – the time a unit was committed to an incident as a percentage of total time on duty – the Department appears to be operating at a high level of activity. The Department is excessively busy with 28 engines and medical units exceeding 10% of UHU, of which four exceed 20% of UHU. Once UHU reaches 10% for a primary responding unit, the Fire Department will see increased challenges to meet response times due to unavailability for immediate response. The City would need to add resources to that station or reduce call volume to meet response time standards.
- **6-5:** Based on adopted standards of cover, San José needed four to six critically missing fire stations to serve its existing service area and level of demand. The passing of Measure T in 2018 enabled advancement toward construction of three new fire stations and replacement of two others. Also, in collaboration with Federal Aviation Administration, Station 20 at San José–Mineta International Airport was replaced and now includes a landside bay to provide service to surrounding areas, making it effectively a fourth new fire station.
- **6-6:** The City of San José FD provides a satisfactory level of services based on the latest ISO rating; however, the City does not meet its adopted response time performance goal of arriving on scene within 8:00 minutes for 80% of

⁸ <https://santaclaralafco.org/sites/default/files/FireSRRReview-FinalReport-2023.pdf>

⁹ https://planbayarea.org/sites/default/files/documents/Plan_Bay_Area_2050_Forecasting_Modeling_Report_October_2021.pdf

Priority 1 incidents, with a response time 8:26 80% of incidents. There is a need for additional staffing based on the adopted standards of cover.

- **6-8:** The primary critical issues regarding fire services within the City of San José according to the City are: 1) closing current staffing gaps for firefighter paramedic, dispatcher, and fire protection engineer classifications, 2) replacing obsolete records management system, and 3) ensuring sustainable EMS services.

Agency responses to the Local Agency Formation Commission of Santa Clara County Report are summarized in the Agency Responses to The Report's Recommendations¹⁰.

Current Authorized Sworn Positions

The FY 2024-2025 Adopted Operating Budget¹¹ authorized 720 sworn positions. Authorized full-time sworn positions by classification are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: FY 2024-2025 Authorized Full-Time Sworn Positions

Sworn Position (Rank)	Authorized Positions
Fire Chief	1
Assistant Fire Chief	1
Deputy Fire Chief	4
Battalion Chief	24
Fire Captain	172
Arson Investigator	4
Fire Prevention Inspector	13
Fire Engineer	234
Firefighter	267
Total	720

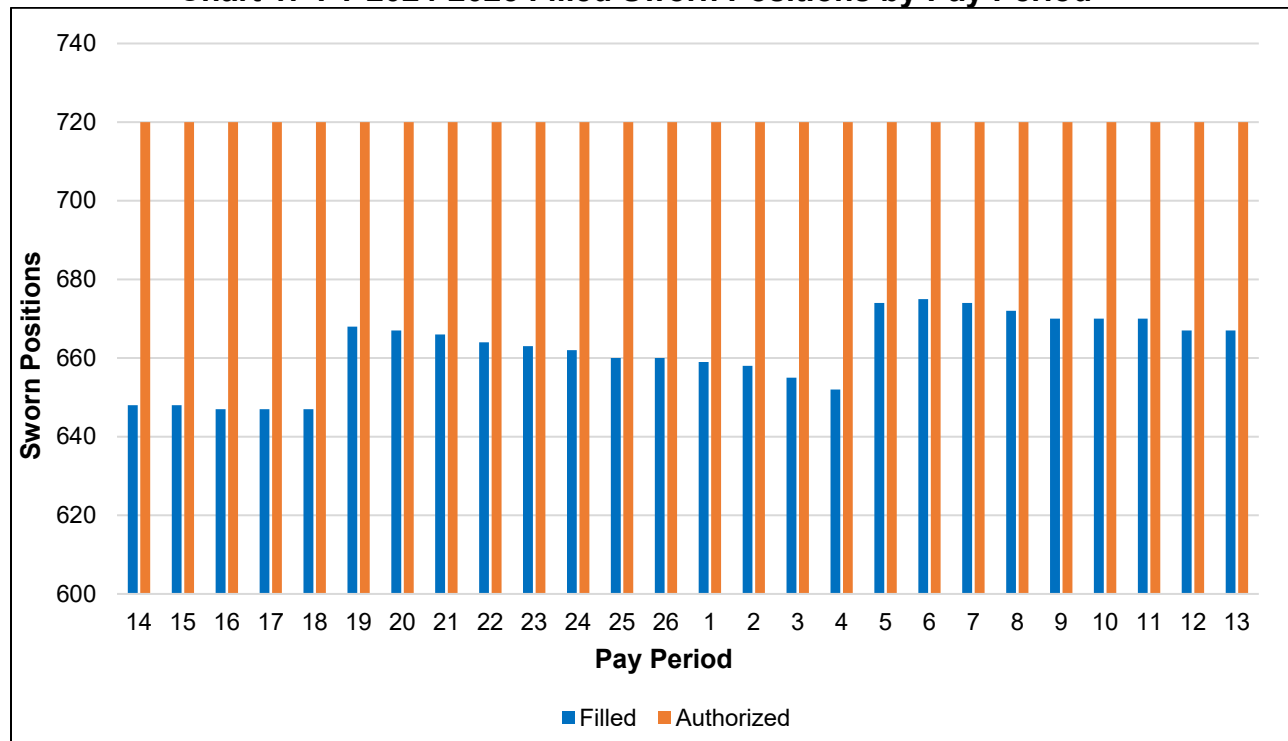
In FY 2024-2025, 32 sworn positions were assigned to 40-hour administrative staff roles. Six of the authorized sworn positions are senior management classifications including Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, and the four Deputy Fire Chiefs. The remaining 680 authorized positions are assigned to 24-hour shift field assignments, approximately 226 per shift (A, B, and C), to support the daily 190 personnel minimum staffing level. Daily vacancies are filled by unassigned on-duty personnel (relief) or by off-duty personnel on an overtime basis. In addition to the 190 minimum staffing positions, one Arson Investigator is staffed daily on a 24-hour schedule across three shifts.

¹⁰ <https://santaclaralafco.org/cities-and-special-districts/service-reviews/third-round/countywide-fire-service-review>

¹¹ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/85356/637872546793930000>

Although there are 720 authorized positions, the number of filled positions fluctuates due to attrition and timing of Firefighter Recruit academies. At the end of FY 2024-2025, (June 30, 2025), actual staffing (filled positions) was 667 sworn personnel, a 5.97% vacancy rate. Chart 1 below reflects filled position numbers for each pay period in FY 2024-2025.

Chart 1: FY 2024-2025 Filled Sworn Positions by Pay Period



ANALYSIS

Filled and Vacant Position Status

The Department maintains ongoing recruitment processes to keep pace with vacancies in sworn ranks which occur due to retirements, separations from employment, or added budgeted positions. Promotions to sworn ranks including battalion chief, fire captain, arson investigator, fire prevention inspector, and fire engineer, are filled internally, and firefighters are onboarded at the firefighter recruit or firefighter level. Firefighter recruits must hold either an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification or Paramedic licensure at the time of application filing deadline. The Department conducts two 20- to 30-person Firefighter Recruit Academies per year. In FY 2024-2025 the Department conducted two firefighter recruit academies, including the 2024-02 academy initiated with 21 firefighter recruits and the 2025-01 academy initiated with 24 firefighter recruits. From FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025, the Department averaged 39 sworn employee separations annually. The average sworn vacancy rate over that period was 7.9%.

Actual Department separations and hiring experience for FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025 are provided in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Separations and Hiring Experience
(FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025)**

FY	Retirements (Service and Disability)	Other Separations	Total Separations	Total Hires	Actual Year End Staffing	Authorized Positions
2020-2021	27	2	29	24	681	707
2021-2022	36	14	50	47	677	719
2022-2023	38	11	49	27	652	720
2023-2024	32	8	40	34	647	723
2024-2025	14	13	27	45	648	720

Maintaining Minimum Staffing Levels

Daily absences and vacancies in field positions are backfilled with on-duty relief personnel and/or off-duty personnel who are called in on an overtime basis to meet minimum staffing requirements. As shown in Table 3, the total absence and vacancy rate of 26.9% in FY 2024-2025 required 552,001 hours of backfill (approximately 184,000 per shift).

Table 3: Absence, Vacancy, and Backfill Hours

Rank	Total Hours	Absence Hours	Vacancy Hours	Hours Requiring Backfill
Battalion Chief	61,152	11,629	784	12,413
Fire Captain	474,656	112,615	10,976	123,591
Fire Engineer	681,408	133,778	80,080	213,858
Firefighter	774,592	96,971	105,168	202,139

The Department's relief staffing model estimates the number of relief positions needed to backfill absences and vacancies. The baseline is the lowest number of absence and vacancy hours used by the personnel in each rank in any FY 2024-2025 pay period. Once the baseline is established based on the actual absence and vacancy data, it can then be determined, by rank, how many relief positions should be staffed. The FY 2024-

2025 baseline hours (lowest absence and vacancy hours that occurred in any pay period) excluding Battalion Chief positions¹² are as follows:

- Fire Captain = 3,076 hours (in 2019-2020 = 2,951 hours)
- Fire Engineer = 6,704 hours (in 2019-2020 = 4,919 hours)
- Firefighter = 5,691 hours (in 2019-2020 = 3,120 hours)

To determine baseline hours by rank, five years of data by rank of absence and vacancy hours are used to smooth out potential anomalies in any given year. Utilizing this methodology, a comparison of the vacancy and absence average baseline hours and coverage hours by relief positions is presented in the following table.

**Table 4: Average Five-Year Baseline Data and Relief Personnel (Hours)
(FY 2019-2020 to FY 2024-2025)**

Rank	Average Absence and Vacancy Hours Baseline	Coverage Hours by Relief Positions	Coverage Hours by Relief (shortfall)/surplus	Relief Positions Needed to Cover Average Baseline Absence and Vacancy
Fire Captain	3,521	3,136	(385)	3.4 Full-time Equivalent employees (FTE) needed
Fire Engineer	6,002	4,032	(1,970)	17.6 FTE needed
Firefighter	4,418	4,928	510	4.6 FTE available
Total	13,941	12,096	(1,845)	16.5 FTE needed

As reflected in Table 4, the number of relief positions for the Firefighter rank is adequate to meet the daily minimum staffing level. However, the Fire Captain position falls short by 3.4 FTE (385 hours) and the Fire Engineer position falls short by roughly 17.6 FTE (1,970 hours). It is important to note that this methodology guides the Department in determining the appropriate number of budgeted relief positions to maintain. It does not serve to predict the number of hours that will need to be backfilled on an overtime basis. The FY 2014-2015 Adopted Operating Budget added 12 Fire Engineer positions and deleted 12 Firefighter positions to improve relief staffing levels. In FY 2015-2016, 26 sworn positions were added to restore Fire Engine 30 and Fire Engine 34, which were previously eliminated in the FY 2010-2011 Adopted Operating Budget. The 26 added positions included 11 Fire Captains, 14 Firefighters, and only four Fire Engineers. With the activation of Fire Station 37, the 2022-2023 Adopted Operating Budget added 14

¹² Battalion Chief positions are excluded from baseline analysis due to the limited number of duty positions (18 for three shifts).

positions including four Fire Captains, four Fire Engineers, three Firefighter/Paramedics, and three Firefighters. As additional fire stations become operationalized, the Department will seek to realign relief staffing levels through future budget actions.

In 2024-2025, year-end overtime expenditures totaled \$35,293,530¹³, however it is prudent to note that the Department's overall Personal Services appropriation (inclusive of salary, benefits, and overtime) resulted in a 99.9% expended rate of the modified budget. By June 30, 2025, actualized overall savings reached approximately \$42,517. Increased dependency on overtime spending was largely attributed to maintaining minimum staffing with increasing call volume experienced in 2024-2025, training, absences, and mutual aid deployments of suppression and overhead resources. In this last fiscal year, the Department responded to 111,373 incidents, a 1% increase compared to levels in the prior year¹⁴. Total absence hours in 2024-2025 increased by approximately 4.7% to 354,992, attributable to sworn personnel utilizing accrued vacation (+2.0%), sick (+12.2%), and disability leave (+9.2%) compared to the previous reporting year – with a notable increase within the Fire Captain rank (14,819 hours compared to the prior year). In FY 2024-2025, the combined absence and vacancy rates were 27.7%, requiring 552,001 hours of backfill covered by a combination of available relief staffing and overtime.

Santa Clara County Fire Company Staffing Levels (FY 2024-2025)

The Department cooperates with other Santa Clara County fire agencies to provide resources when and where they are most needed through local mutual aid and automatic aid agreements. While apparatus types are standardized, each agency is unique relative to how many resources they deploy and how they are staffed.

Tables 5 below provides individual Santa Clara County fire agencies' resource deployment and staffing relative to population, square miles protected, fire stations to population ratios, and fire company staffing levels. Areas protected by CalFire including state responsibility areas, City of Morgan Hill, and South Santa Clara County Fire Protection District are excluded.

Table 5: Santa Clara County Fire Agencies Staffing to Population¹⁵

Fire Agency	Population Served	Sworn Personnel	Staffing to Population
San José*	979,415	720	0.75 per 1,000
Santa Clara County	258,315	248	2.70 per 1,000

¹³ An offset of \$3,737,913 was applied to the Department's net expenditure budget due to reimbursements from Cal OES for mutual aid deployments.

¹⁴ In 2023-2024, the Department responded to 110,255 incidents (Priority 1 & 2).

¹⁵ <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/estimates-e1/>

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Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety (DPS)**	159,673	85	0.53 per 1,000
Santa Clara	134,587	138	1.02 per 1,000
Mountain View	86,513	80	0.93 per 1,000
Milpitas	81,915	75	0.93 per 1,000
Palo Alto	68,794	93	1.36 per 1,000
Gilroy	62,205	44	0.71 per 1,000

Excludes population within 26.81 square miles of Santa Clara County Zone 1 Contract coverage area.

***Sunnyvale DPS provides both law enforcement and fire protection.*

Table 6: Santa Clara County Fire Agencies Square Miles Per Fire Station

Fire Agency	Square Miles	Fire Stations	Square Miles per Fire Station
San José	235*	34	6.9
Santa Clara County	132	15	8.8
Sunnyvale DPS	22.9	6	3.8
City of Santa Clara	20	10	2.0
Mountain View	12	5	2.4
Milpitas	13.6	4	3.4
Palo Alto	31.5	7	4.5
Gilroy	16.5	5	4.1

**Includes 26.81 square miles of Santa Clara County Zone 1 Contract coverage area.*

Table 7: Santa Clara County Fire Agencies Fire Stations to Population Ratio

Fire Agency	Population*	Fire Stations	Fire Stations to Population (Average)
San José	979,415	34	28,806
Santa Clara County	258,315	15	17,221
Sunnyvale DPS*	159,673	6	26,612
Santa Clara	134,587	10	13,459
Mountain View	86,513	5	17,302
Milpitas	81,915	4	20,478
Palo Alto	68,794	7	9,828
Gilroy	62,205	4	15,551

**Population estimates by California Department of Finance, January 1, 2025; excludes population within 26.81 square miles of Santa Clara County Zone 1 Contract coverage area.*

Table 8: Santa Clara County Fire Agencies Fire Company Staffing

Fire Agency	Engine Staffing	Truck Staffing	Daily Staffing
San José	4	4	190
Santa Clara County*	3	4	79
Sunnyvale DPS	2	2	26
City of Santa Clara	3	4	36
Mountain View	3	3	21
Milpitas	3	4	19
Palo Alto	3	3	24
Gilroy	3	3	9

*Effective July 1, 2025, Santa Clara County (Central) Fire Protection District and South Santa Clara County Fire Protection District consolidated. Table 8 reflects data prior to the consolidation.

National Staffing Levels

Amongst the 15 most populous U.S. cities, all but one provide four or more personnel per Engine Company. Staffing to population ratios amongst those cities range from 0.72 to 2.09 per 1,000 residents based upon budget authorized positions and U.S. Census population estimates. San José and San Diego ranked lowest at slightly over 0.72 and 0.77, respectively, per 1,000 residents. Chicago and Philadelphia ranked highest at 1.89 and 2.09, respectively. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710.5.2.3.1 provides, “Fire companies whose primary functions are to pump and deliver water and perform basic firefighting at fires, including search and rescue, shall be known as engine companies.” Further, NFPA 1710.5.2.3.1.1 specifies that these companies, “shall be staffed with a minimum of four on-duty members.” Sixteen of the 17 most populous U.S. cities meet this requirement. Table 9 below details the 17 most populous U.S. cities for FY 2024-2025.

Table 9: Staffing to Population in Largest U.S. Cities (Population >800,000)

City	Estimated Population	Sworn Personnel	Staffing to Population
New York, New York	8,478,000	10,952	1.29
Los Angeles, California	3,835,263	3,246	0.85
Chicago, Illinois	2,721,308	5,148	1.89
Houston, Texas	2,390,125	3,643	1.52
Phoenix, Arizona	1,673,164	1,848	1.1
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1,573,916	3,299	2.09
San Antonio, Texas	1,526,656	1,868	1.22
San Diego, California	1,404,452	1,088	0.77
Dallas, Texas	1,326,087	2,259	1.70
Jacksonville, Florida	1,009,833	1,200	1.18

Fort Worth, Texas	1,008,106	1,049	1.04
San José, California	997,368	720	0.72
Austin, Texas	993,588	1,303	1.31
Columbus, Ohio	993,263	1,765	1.8
Charlotte, North Carolina	943,476	1,203	1.27

Span of Control

NFPA 1550 (2024 Edition): Standard for Emergency Responder Health and Safety, states that, “The most important factor in establishing supervisory levels within the command structure is the need to maintain an effective span of control. A span of control of responders between three and seven is considered desirable in most cases.” NFPA fire officer instructional texts define span of control as “the maximum number of personnel or activities that can be effectively controlled by one individual (usually three to seven).” The Department maintains 3:1 span of control on Engine and Truck companies with a Fire Captain (company officer) assigned to each deployed resource. The FY 2023-2024 Operating Budget authorized three additional Battalion Chiefs, enabling the deployment of a sixth battalion at Fire Station 35 resulting in a Battalion Chief to Fire Captain span of control of 1:6-8. Prior to the establishment of Battalion 35, Battalion Chief to Fire Captain span of control was 1:8-10.

Table 10: Current Battalion Chief/Company Officer Span of Control

	Battalion 1	Battalion 2	Battalion 5	Battalion 10	Battalion 13	Battalion 35
Company Officers	8	7	7	7	8	6

Arson Unit Staffing

The Arson Unit is the sole law enforcement division within the Department conducting fire cause investigations, arson determinations, and arson law enforcement. Arson Investigators possess firefighting training and experience, State Fire Marshal Investigator training and certification, and deputized Peace Officer status. The Arson Unit maintains one Arson Investigator on duty per 24-hour shift (A, B, C) and is supervised by a Fire Captain assigned to a 40-hour work week. The on-duty Arson Investigator provides citywide support to Incident Commanders and fire company officers by assisting with fire cause determination and providing initial instructions when arson is suspected. In response to arson-suspected fires, Arson Investigators initiate investigations, including actions such as examining fire scenes and documenting findings, capturing and preserving evidence, conducting suspect surveillance, coordinating investigations and arrests with law enforcement, conducting arrests and cooperating with prosecutors. To strengthen 24-hour availability for investigation and prosecution of arson crimes, the FY 2022-2023 Adopted Operating Budget authorized

one additional Arson Investigator position to better maintain uninterrupted coverage for absences and vacancies.

EMT Certification and Paramedic Licensure

To deliver advanced life support services on all response resources, the Department maintains 94 EMTs and 173 paramedics in the Firefighter rank. At the end of FY 2024-2025, there were 56 Firefighter/Paramedic vacancies. Firefighter Recruit EMT applicants far exceed the number of paramedic applicants. Paramedic applicants' numbers have been slow to recover post COVID-19, and competition for hiring amongst advanced life support providers – both ambulance and fire services – continues to be a factor in paramedic hiring. At the end of FY 2024-2025, there were 122 fully accredited Firefighter/Paramedics in the Department. The Department continued to maintain approximately 100 Support Paramedics in the ranks of Fire Engineer and Fire Captain to ease overtime burden on Firefighter/Paramedics.

Department Status on Recruitment and Hiring

The Department engages in ongoing recruitment and training efforts to maintain authorized non-sworn and sworn staffing levels. In FY 2024-2025 Department staff executed 126 hiring and promotion transactions to fill vacancies throughout the organization. Hirings included two Firefighter Recruit Academies initiated in September 2024 and March 2025, which yielded 18 and 17 graduates, respectively. Department-provided ongoing career development and trainings are critical to delivering safe, efficient, and effective responses to all community risks, including fire, rescue, hazardous materials releases, and emergency medical services requests. Department staff is engaged in all sworn recruitments in coordination with the Human Resources Department.

External Sworn Recruitments (Firefighter Recruit)

Firefighter recruitment processes attract many applicants for a limited number of position openings. The Department establishes and maintains Firefighter Eligibility Lists at approximately two-year intervals, depending on the timing of hiring and list viability. Firefighter Recruits are external recruitments with a rigorous multi-step process and a 20-week, entry-level academy that prepares them for field duty. Upon successful completion of the academy, they graduate into the Firefighter classification and begin their probationary period in the Bureau of Field Operations.

The Department's minimum qualifications allow persons with little or no firefighting background to enter the service; however, qualified applicants will have obtained emergency medical technician certification or a paramedic license to meet minimum qualifications.

Firefighter minimum qualifications at the time of application include:

- Graduation from High School or equivalent (G.E.D. or California Proficiency Certificate).
- Possession of a valid driver's license at time of application. Must obtain a California driver's license, if issued by another state, prior to promotion to the Firefighter classification.
- Possession of a current and valid State of California Emergency Medical Technician Certification or Certified by the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, Emergency Medical Technician – Basic within one year of application filing deadline (preferably at time of application).
- Proof of a valid Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) within six months of application filing deadline and additionally, within one year prior to date of hire. The CPAT must be renewed annually to remain valid.
- At least 18 years of age at written examination date.

The Department strives to reflect the community it serves by attracting a diverse and qualified candidate pool through extensive outreach and recruitment activities. In FY 2024-2025, excluding one lateral recruitment cycle, 2,107 applicants expressed interest in joining the Department, of which 1,329 were considered qualified to continue the recruitment process. Table 11 below illustrates the number of applicants and demographic data of the total qualified recruit candidates by ethnicity.

Table 11: Demographic Breakdown of Qualified Candidates (Ethnicity)

Demographic Data Point	Academy 24-01 Total	Academy 24-03 Total	Academy 25-01 Total
<i>Applications Received</i>	782	153	1,172
<i>Applicants Considered Qualified</i>	449	79	801
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	0	1
American Indian, Alaskan Native, and/or Indigenous (1)*	6	0	7
Black or African American (1)* (1)**	28	7	52
Hispanic (4)* (7)**	131	28	249
Chinese (1)**	9	1	16
Cambodian	0	1	3
Cuban	0	0	0
Filipino (2)* (1)** (2)**	35	4	32
Guamanian or Chamorro	0	0	0
Hmong	1	0	0
Indian	1	1	4
Indonesian	1	0	2
Japanese	3	0	7
Korean (1)*	2	0	9

Malaysian	1	0	0
Pakistani	0	0	1
Puerto Rican	0	0	0
Taiwanese	0	0	2
Thai	2	0	2
Vietnamese	6	1	12
Native Hawaiian/Samoan/Tongan/Pacific Islander (1)*	5	0	7
White (not of Hispanic Origin) (8)* (2)** (12)***	195	29	355
Decline to State (1)***	22	7	40
Total	449	79	801

* Number of qualified female candidates in 24-01 (Total: 18)

** Number of qualified female candidates in 24-03 (Total: 3)

***Number of qualified female candidates in 25-01 (Total: 24)

FY 2024-2025 Firefighter recruitments included 45 female applicants. Of the total female applicant pool, 45 candidates met position minimum qualifications.

Internal Sworn Recruitments (Promotions)

The Department and Human Resources Department conduct processes establishing promotional eligibility lists for the six non-management ranks above Firefighter, including Fire Engineer, Fire Prevention Inspector, Arson Investigator, Fire Captain, and Battalion Chief. Each classification has minimum qualifications, unique job requirements, and requires a separate recruitment process. In promotional recruitments, applicants meeting minimum qualifications for the position and successfully passing all phases of the testing process are placed on a promotion eligibility list ranked by total test scores, seniority, and other points, as applicable. Promotion eligibility lists generally expire after two years and may be extended up to a year. The City's Municipal Code specifies how promotions from an eligibility list will be administered:

“Rank on an eligibility list determines the order of names certified as available for appointment. The ten highest are certified for one vacancy. Where there is more than one vacancy, the number certified is the number of vacancies plus ten. The appointing authority may select any eligible candidates among the certified eligible list to fill the available vacancies, as there is no requirement to select certified eligibles in rank order.” (City Municipal Code Section 3.04.780.F.1)

In FY 2024-2025, there were 37 sworn promotions which included one Deputy Fire Chief, one Battalion Chief, 16 Fire Captains, one Fire Prevention Inspector, and 18 Fire Engineers.

Recruitment Marketing and Outreach

The Department's goal is to optimize recruitment marketing and outreach efforts within its limited resource capacity. These efforts leverage interest from employee resource groups, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, social media, webpages, and advertising platforms. In FY 2024-2025, the Department conducted enhanced recruiting efforts through the following actions:

- Extended recruitment and public outreach efforts at 90 public engagements¹⁶;
- Welcomed more than 75 participants to the 6th Annual *SJFD Women's+ Boot Camp*;
- Advertised open recruitments across multiple online platforms and through Citywide messaging, fire station banners, and the California Firefighter Joint Apprenticeship Committee.

SJFD Women's+ Boot Camp

The SJFD Women's+ Boot Camp is intended to draw an increase in the number of female applicants to the entry-level Firefighter positions. This event was initially proposed and developed by a Department female firefighter and non-sworn female administrative staff in 2019. The boot camp is intended to engage and inspire women to pursue a highly rewarding career in the fire service. Delivered by female firefighters and non-sworn female administrative personnel, the one-day boot camp introduces interested attendees to the physical and mental demands of the job and offers hands-on exercises using firefighting tools and equipment, and small group and one-on-one dialogue sessions. The FY 2024-2025 boot camp expanded the attraction by changing the minimum eligibility age to 16 and was broadly announced by the Department and drew more than 75 participants to the event that was held on May 17, 2025. The Department is committed to providing at least one Women's+ Boot Camp event annually, pending availability of funds.

Accredited Local Academy

The Department is a State Fire Marshal Accredited Local Academy. An Accredited Local Academy is defined as a partnership between a fire agency serving a specific authority having jurisdiction and the Office of the State Fire Marshal to deliver approved State Fire Training curriculum within a given region. The Accredited Local Academy status enables the Department to deliver approved State Fire Training curriculum with the support of Department-certified instructors, allowing internal scheduling, prioritization, and coordination.

¹⁶ Educational institutions (39), trade schools (six), and community special events (45)

South Bay Regional Public Safety Training Consortium (South Bay)

The South Bay¹⁷ operates under a Joint Powers Agreement with eight community colleges and certifies training in law enforcement, fire services, emergency medical training, dispatch, and more. The South Bay reaches approximately 2,700 full-time equivalent students each year, including professionals from more than 70 City and County agencies. South Bay delivers entry-level fire service training and continuing education curriculum for fire service professionals. The Department works closely with South Bay to provide timely courses for career development and offers opportunities for development and recruitment.

San José Fire Explorer Post 888

The Department continued its support of San José Fire Explorer Post 888¹⁸ throughout FY 2024-2025. A Learning for Life program, San José Explorer Post 888 helps young adults, 16-18 years old, prepare for a career in the fire service with classroom training and hands-on lessons on the drill grounds. Participants work with the Department to learn firefighting and leadership skills, all while having fun and earning community service hours. This program provides one of many pipelines to the fire service and many of these participants matriculate to local junior colleges, EMT, and paramedic programs to obtain their certification, a minimum qualification to become a firefighter.

Advertising, Marketing, and Social Media Resources

The Department maintains a robust and user-friendly landing page that features current employment opportunities and the Electronic Interest Card via the E-Notification system. This system allows those interested in a job with the Department to sign up for notifications when jobs are open. The Department has a prominent social media presence and advertises employment opportunities and events on platforms including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, and YouTube.

Sworn Bilingual Services

The Department maintains a vision to provide bilingual capabilities in all services delivered, including emergency medical services, fire suppression, fire prevention, and public education activities by staffing certified bilingual sworn employees at all fire stations on each work shift. As of June 30, 2025, there were 160 sworn employees (24.5%) in the Department who spoke a second language, with 23 languages recognized for certification.

¹⁷ South Bay Regional Public Safety Training Consortium: <https://theacademy.ca.gov/>

¹⁸ San José Fire Explorer Post 888. <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/fire-department/recruitment/san-jose-fire-explorers-post-888>

Fire Department "Vision 2023" Strategic Business Plan

The City Council approved the *San José Fire Department's "Vision 2023" Strategic Business Plan*¹⁹ (Plan) on June 7, 2016. A key focus area of the Plan, titled "Sustainable Workforce," established goals towards "Active recruitment of a diverse workforce, on-going training for line staff, succession planning, reduced job-related injuries, improved health and safety of line staff."

These goals are:

- Actively recruit, train, and support a talented and diverse workforce.
- Ensure that all personnel have the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to excel within their role in the organization.
- Provide career development opportunities to personnel to reach their fullest professional potential.
- Provide and promote a culture of safety, health, and wellness.

Within each goal are several specified objectives. The Department remains focused on achieving the goals and objectives of the Plan.

FY 2024-2025 Firefighter Recruit Recruitment Activity

Firefighter Eligibility Lists typically expire after two years and may be extended depending on Department needs and list viability. Demographics from the eligibility list established on September 7, 2020, are illustrated in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Firefighter Eligibility List Captured Demographics

Demographic Data Point	Firefighter Recruit Academy 24-03 September 16, 2024 – February 14, 2025		Firefighter Recruit Academy 25-01 March 3, 2025 – July 18, 2025	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
California Resident	21	100.00%	20	100.00%
Out of State Resident	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
San José Resident	7	33.33%	3	15.00%
Non-San José Resident	14	66.67%	17	85.00%
Gender: Male	19	90.48%	17	85.00%
Gender: Female	2	9.52%	3	15.00%
Gender: Undisclosed	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
EMT Certified	5	23.81%	5	25.00%

¹⁹ http://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=2139&meta_id=576586

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Licensed Paramedic	16	76.19%	15	75.00%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	19.05%	1	5.00%
Black, African American	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Mexican, Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin	10	47.62%	5	25.00%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
White, Caucasian	6	28.57%	14	70.00%
Undisclosed (Race/Ethnicity)	1	4.76%	0	0.00%

The FY 2022-2023 Adopted Operating Budget authorized 720 sworn positions. As of June 30, 2023, 652 (approximately 90%) of the 720 authorized positions were filled with 68 vacancies remaining as seen in Table 13 below.

Table 13: Authorized Full-Time Sworn Positions (as of June 23,2025)

Sworn Position (Rank)	Authorized Positions	Filled Positions	Vacant Positions
Fire Chief	1	1	0
Assistant Fire Chief	1	1	0
Deputy Fire Chief	4	4	0
Battalion Chief	24	24	0
Fire Captain	172	160	12
Arson Investigator	4	4	0
Fire Prevention Inspector	13	12	1
Fire Engineer	234	210	24
Firefighter	267	232	35
Total	720	648	72
		Vacancy Rate	10.00%

As previously noted, the Department seeks to actively recruit, train, and support a talented and diverse workforce. To that end, demographic data is maintained to monitor progress and guide recruitment efforts. Table 14, shown below, provides gender and race/ethnicity data across sworn ranks.

Table 14: Sworn Personnel Demographic

Sworn Position (Rank)	Senior Staff	BC*	CA	AI	FPI	FE	FF
Female (27)	0	1	6	1	2	4	13
American Indian or Alaskan Native (8)	0	1	4	0	0	1	2
Asian/Pacific Islander (51)	1	3	20	0	2	15	10
Mexican, Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin (101)	1	5	36	0	2	34	23
White, Caucasian (237)	2	13	94	3	5	92	28
Undisclosed/Declined to State (Race/Ethnicity) (249)	1	4	14	1	2	68	159
Total: (660)	6	26	176	4	12	211	225

* Key: BC = Battalion Chief, CA = Captain, AI = Arson Investigator, FPI = Fire Prevention Investigator, FE = Fire Engineer, FF = Firefighter

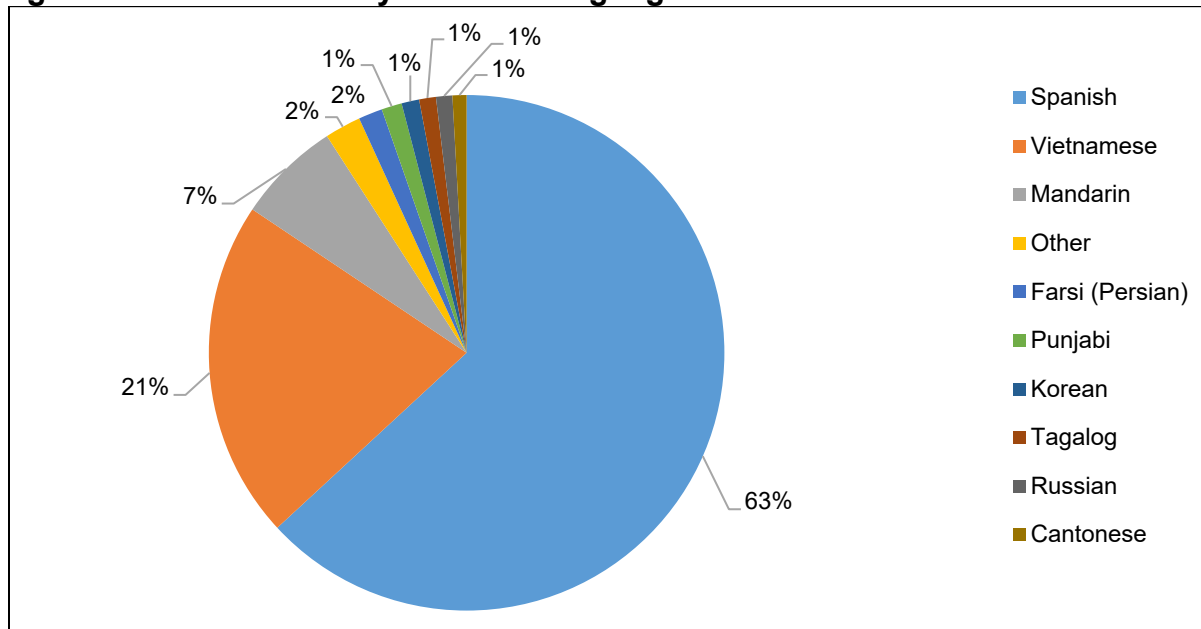
Bilingual Services

In response to community emergencies, verbal communications are most critical in the 9-1-1 Dispatch Center as incident details are gathered and prearrival instructions are provided for 9-1-1 callers while field resources are enroute. The Department's Fire Communications dispatchers utilize language interpreter services provided by Cyacom, which is contracted by California Office of Emergency Services to assist in processing incoming 9-1-1 calls. When a non-English speaking caller is on the line, the Cyacom service is accessed by the dispatcher. When the language is known, the dispatcher can connect directly to an interpreter for the most encountered languages. Otherwise, a Cyacom operator assists with the identification of the language and patches the call to an available individual meeting the language requirements. The dispatcher then proceeds to follow protocols with the interpreter's assistance. In FY 2024-2025, the service was utilized 3,523 times, or on approximately 3.2% of total incidents.

Sworn responders frequently encounter non-English speaking civilians in emergency situations where translation is beneficial to emergency mitigation. In these situations, responders must rely on a Fire Department responder's matching language skill or a

third-party translator. In FY 2024-2025, responders reported requiring language translation at 3,320 incidents, approximately 2.98% of the 111,373 total incidents. These instances are logged in the Department's records management system (Firehouse) where responders reported meeting the language translation need 95.45% of the time through bilingual Fire Department responders, assistance from bystanders, bilingual Police Department responders, Language Line Solutions translation service, or other means. Figure 1 below displays frequently encountered language needs in which Cyracom and Language Line Solutions were utilized in FY 2024-2025.

Figure 1: FY 2024-2025 Cyracom & Language Line Translation Service Utilization



The Department currently recognizes 19 languages for certification. The recognized are noted in the figure above. The City of San José's Human Resources Department provides testing and services for employees pursuing certification.

Bilingual Capabilities per Fire Station

Fire personnel may bid for positions at fire stations where vacancies exist, as announced in Assignment Orders. These positions are awarded in the bidding process principally by seniority in rank, except in circumstances where organizational needs supersede. Vacant positions at fire stations identified as high need for bilingual capabilities are awarded to the high seniority certified bilingual bidder. In these circumstances, this information is communicated during the bidding process via the Assignment Order announcement.

The Department has a vision of providing bilingual capabilities at every fire station on every shift and encourages bilingual personnel to bid on these positions as they

become available. Based on the needs of the community, the Fire Chief may elect to assign personnel with bilingual skills to these stations. Using the bid results of Assignment Orders, the following fire stations are to be considered the priority group for bilingual assignments on the next bid. This priority list of fire stations is not a static list and can change with each assignment order; the changes will be based on personnel movement and language need. Battalion Chiefs are encouraged to assign bilingual relief personnel into those fire stations where a language need has been identified. As of June 30, 2025, there were 160 sworn employees (24.5%) in the Department who spoke a language other than English, with 19 languages recognized for certification. Table 15 below reflects the current number and assignment distribution of language certified line personnel assigned to field operations.

Table 15: Bilingual Capabilities per Fire Station

STATION	A-SHIFT	B-SHIFT	C-SHIFT	TOTAL
1	Spanish (2)	Spanish (1)	Spanish (2)	5
2	Spanish (1) Vietnamese (2)	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1) Cantonese (1)	6
3			Spanish (1) Mandarin (1)	2
4	Spanish (1)		Spanish (2)	3
5	Spanish (2) Portuguese (1)		Vietnamese (1)	4
6	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1) Vietnamese (1) Japanese (1)	Spanish (1)	5
7		Spanish (1)	Spanish (1)	2
8	Khmer (1)	Spanish (1) Vietnamese (1)		3
9	Spanish (1)	Tagalog (1)		2
10	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1) Russian (1)	Vietnamese (1) Spanish (1)	5
11	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1) Vietnamese (1)		3
12			Spanish (1)	1
13	Spanish (2)	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1)	4
14		Spanish (1)	Spanish (1) Russian (1)	3
15		Spanish (1)	Spanish (1)	2
16	Vietnamese (1)	Spanish (3)	Spanish (4)	8
17	Spanish (1)	Assyrian (1)		2
18	Spanish (1)	Vietnamese (1)	Spanish (2)	4

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19	Spanish (1)		Spanish (1)	2
20		Spanish (2) Russian (1)	Spanish (2)	5
21	Spanish (2)	Spanish (2) Vietnamese (1)	Cantonese (1)	6
22		Tagalog (1)	Vietnamese (1)	2
23	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1)	Cantonese (1)	3
24	Spanish (2)	Spanish (1) Vietnamese (1)	Tagalog (1)	5
25		Spanish (1)		1
26	Spanish (1) Cantonese (1) Russian (1)	Spanish (2) Turkish (1)	Spanish (1)	6
27			Spanish (1)	1
28	German (1)	Spanish (2)	Spanish (2)	6
29		Khmer (1)		1
30	Cantonese (1) Spanish (2)	Spanish (1)	Spanish (1) Portuguese (1)	6
31				0
34	Spanish (2)	Spanish (2) Italian (1)	Spanish (1) Armenian (1) Tagalog (1)	8
35	Spanish (1)	Tagalog (1)	Spanish (1)	3
37	Russian (1)		Spanish (1)	2
Relief*	10	12	8	30
Total	46	55	50	151

*33 sworn staff assigned to Battalion relief are placed in day-of-staffing vacancies.

The Department will continue to consider adding to the list of recognized certified languages on a case-by-case basis, dependent upon community needs. Additionally, we will evaluate the assignment distribution of bilingual relief personnel, especially relief personnel to close the gap in bilingual positions at fire stations where bilingual skills are not currently available.

The Department's Bilingual Policy requires the assignment of a certified bilingual employee at each fire station, on each shift. With 34 fire stations and three shifts, 102 placements are required to achieve the program vision. Presently, fire station bilingual skill assignments total 123 and there are 30 certified bilingual personnel assigned to relief across the three shifts who can be assigned to fire stations lacking bilingual skills when feasible. The Department will continue to maximize the placement of relief personnel and will continue to engage the International Association of Firefighters, Local

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230 and other stakeholders to improve the distribution of bilingual skills across fire stations.

COORDINATION

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office, City Manager's Budget Office, and Human Resources Department.



— ROBERT SAPIEN, JR.
Fire Chief, Fire Department

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