



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Councilmember Huizar and Weiss Push to Put LAFD Oversight Position on March Ballot

Assessor's position would oversee LAFD's reform efforts

LOS ANGELES (Thursday, Oct. 2, 2008) – Following a scathing audit and several multimillion dollar lawsuits against the Los Angeles Fire Department, Councilmembers José Huizar and Jack Weiss will introduce City legislation Friday calling for a March 2009 ballot measure that would create an LAFD oversight position to monitor the department's reform efforts.

The action comes on the heels of a critical 2006 audit by the City Controller and the controversy over the Tennie Pierce lawsuit. It is aimed at ensuring the public that the reforms currently being instituted at the LAFD under current Chief Douglas L. Barry – appointed by Mayor Villaraigosa – are here to stay and that discipline rules are consistently enforced.

“The Independent Assessor will ensure that the reforms Chief Barry is trying to implement are strictly adhered to, and to inform the public if they're not,” said Councilmember José Huizar, who chairs the Audits & Governmental Efficiency Committee. “We need to put the focus back on the important work our fire fighters do on a daily basis.”

Councilmember Jack Weiss chairs the Public Safety Committee.

“Accountability and oversight help prevent discrimination and lawsuits in the fire department and with a new independent assessor the city will save taxpayer money and ensure that discipline is handled appropriately whenever it is necessary,” Weiss said.

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A critical component to the City's reform efforts, the Independent Assessor position would be similar in function to the LAPD's Inspector General, which was created by voters in 1995 as part of reform proposed by the Christopher Commission. That position was structured to report to the Police Commission, which is made up of civilians.

In order to replicate this same arrangement with the Fire Commission, which has been forceful in its advocacy of department reform, the City Attorney has said the City Charter would have to be amended to grant the Commission the authority to hire and fire the Assessor, guaranteeing independence and objectivity.

“I applaud Councilmembers Huizar and Weiss for pushing for an Independent Assessor for the Fire Department, which was one of my audit’s most important recommendations,” said City Controller Laura Chick. “It is time to eliminate hazing, harassment and discrimination from the Fire Department once and for all, and this independent oversight is key in doing that.”

The City has seen a number of high-profile discrimination and harassment lawsuits involving LAFD personnel in recent years, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

The Audits & Governmental Efficiency Committee, chaired by Huizar, and the Public Safety Committee, chaired by Weiss, have been meeting jointly on a regular basis since January, when a new set of LAFD discipline standards were introduced, to spur the department to accelerate its efforts at implementing reform.

LAFD is set to hire the last remaining positions of its New Professional Standards Division, which will oversee internal discipline and investigate complaints by members of the public and among LAFD personnel. The highest priority will be placed on complaints between firefighters that have the potential to result in large lawsuits against the City.

The Independent Assessor motion will be introduced jointly by Huizar and Weiss to the City Council on Friday and then heard before the Rules Committee at its October 22 meeting. The Council will then have until October 29 to instruct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance and resolution to place the proposal on the March ballot. Since that would be a municipal election, the costs for adding the measure would be minimal.

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