

# LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



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BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
FILE NO. 25-048

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM: *RV* Ronnie R. Villanueva, Interim Fire Chief

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE 2023 REPORT FROM THE INDEPENDENT  
ASSESSOR ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

## SUMMARY

The Board of Fire Commissioners (BOFC) has directed the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) to provide an updated response to the 2023 report titled "Assessment of the Los Angeles Fire Department's handling of sexual harassment complaint investigations" (BOFC 23-122). A previous response was delivered to the BOFC on May 7, 2024 (BOFC 24-044). This report will state the firm position of the current LAFD administration concerning sexual harassment complaints, outline tangible actions taken to prevent any form of harassment, and respond to the recommendations provided by the Independent Assessor.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board:  
Receive and file.

## DISCUSSION

The LAFD maintains a firm, unambiguous zero-tolerance stance on any form of sexual harassment that is in alignment with policies outlined by the City of Los Angeles. The LAFD Discrimination Prevention Policy Handbook (DPPH) provides the following description of sexual harassment policy:

The policy of the City of Los Angeles and the Fire Department is that sexual harassment in the workplace is unacceptable and will not be condoned or tolerated. The City of Los Angeles and the Fire Department promote and maintain a working environment free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment, intimidation, retaliation or coercion. The Fire Department is committed to providing a work environment free from sexual harassment. This means everyone is responsible for the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace. City policy requires prompt and appropriate corrective action to

prevent sexual harassment.

The Fire Department maintains a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination based on sexual harassment. As a result, the Department may take corrective actions up to and including formal discipline when policy violations occur, even if they are not so serious as to be unlawful. For example, even though a sexual comment might not rise to the level of creating a hostile work environment under the law, such a comment is nevertheless unacceptable in the workplace, violates the Fire Department's zero tolerance policy, and may be subject to a corrective action.

The DPPH continues to define sexual harassment with great specificity. Types of harassment, examples of harassing behavior, and tools for recognizing harassment are provided. The policy of the LAFD focuses on preventing sexual harassment. The DPPH provides a supervisor's guide (Appendix A) that equips all LAFD supervisors with tools to prevent harassment, recognize and stop an occurrence, and report it properly. The LAFD derives its zero-tolerance stance on harassment and discrimination from the comprehensive harassment policies of the City of Los Angeles.

The City of Los Angeles has been a model for nondiscrimination in the workplace. In 1992, the City Council adopted a Discrimination Free Workplace Policy that outlined the necessity of all City employees to share responsibility to prevent acts of harassment and report them properly. The policy was updated in 1999 and enhanced in 2004 when Mayor James Hahn signed Executive Directive PE-1, which required a thorough investigation of all complaints. Policies related to the topic were again expanded in 2008 with Executive Directive 12, "Policy against Discrimination in Employment based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Gender Expression." Mayor Garcetti further built upon these directives with Executive Directives 11, 18, and 23. The position of the City of Los Angeles and, by extension, the LAFD, has been consistent for decades. There is zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

The current Interim Fire Chief reinforced this decades-old position in one of his first Official Messages by stating in writing as a Fire Chief's Message on April 10, 2025, that was directed to all members:

Let me be clear: There is no place in this department for discrimination, hazing, or unjust treatment of any member. Every firefighter, paramedic, and employee deserves to work in an environment where they are valued, supported, and treated with dignity. That is non-negotiable.

Tangible actions have been taken to prevent any form of sexual harassment, ensure that incidents are recognized and stopped immediately, and appropriately documented. The LAFD has adhered to the position of the City of Los Angeles by establishing internal policy and training all members in the whole gamut of City policies. All LAFD sworn members are trained on the DPPH, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy, and sexual harassment during the recruit training academy. Furthermore, all supervisors and non-supervisors are trained biennially (every other year) on the state-

required curriculum that focuses on preventing, stopping, and reporting harassment. The Mayor has required that all members attend Anti-Bias Learning for Employees annually and Workplace Equity Policy biennially.

The Professional Standards Division (PSD) manages the proper documentation, investigation, and adjudication of cases involving claims of sexual harassment. PSD completed the development of a new Complaint Management System (CMS). Effective January 8, 2025, this system replaced the legacy Complaint Tracking System (CTS). The PSD Commander was among the Command Staff changes made by the Interim Fire Chief. New software and new leadership are enforcing existing LAFD policy. PSD has reported that from August 2020 to the present day, fourteen (14) claims related to sexual harassment were filed.

The Equity and Human Resources Bureau (EHRB) was created in response to the 2021 Deloitte Organization Study (BOFC 21-084 & 22-021) with the intention of providing enhanced human resources management. In the upcoming fiscal year 2025/2026, the EHRB has been downsized by eliminating five of the nine positions. The remaining four positions have been moved under the supervision of the Health & Safety Division. The work associated with the EHRB specifically provides training for all members on the prevention and recognition of harassing behavior. The remaining staff will continue this work under the supervision of the Workforce Effectiveness Section Commander.

The report of the independent assessor made four (4) recommendations. Much has been done to address all four (4) recommendations.

**1. The Fire Chief must create an environment in which everyone takes responsibility for creating an inclusive workplace; where reporting misconduct is honored as a Department priority, and targets and reporters are protected from any and all retribution.**

The DPPH addresses all three clauses of this recommendation. Section II, B covers the responsibilities of all members: "All members are responsible for preventing sexual harassment and every member is entitled to work in an environment free from sexual harassment or retaliation." Furthermore, the DPPH Section II, F outlines a clear standard on retribution, which is a synonym for retaliation:

LAFD maintains a zero-tolerance policy for retaliation. The Department prohibits retaliation against anyone who reports discriminatory activity, registers a complaint pursuant to the policy, assists in making a discrimination complaint, or who cooperates in an investigation. Any member who makes a complaint regarding behavior the member believes is sexual harassment; assists, testifies, or participates in any sexual harassment investigation or proceeding; or who opposes such conduct in the workplace, will not be adversely affected in the terms and conditions of his or her employment, and will not be discriminated against or discharged for engaging in such activity.

The Interim Fire Chief has built upon this long-standing written policy by prioritizing work environment and professionalism in his initial messages to the organization. For example, in a message dated June 20, 2025, all members were directed as follows:

As members of the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD), our duty has always been, and remains, to provide the highest standard of emergency service to every person who lives, works, or visits our city, without prejudice or discrimination. We do not participate in federal immigration enforcement activities. Our focus remains on our mission: To preserve life, protect property, and safeguard our communities through relentless commitment to emergency preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery.

The Interim Fire Chief remains committed to creating a working environment that is in alignment with LAFD and broader Los Angeles City Policies.

**2. Supervisors must be held accountable for creating a harassment and discrimination free workplace. This must include zero tolerance for racist and sexist comments. Supervisors must receive training to effectively manage conflict, and prevent and stop inappropriate conduct.**

Supervisors are held to an even higher standard than non-supervisors. As stated in the DPPH:

Officers, Managers and Supervisors are in key positions to make an impact in terms of immediately correcting inappropriate behavior in the workplace and ensuring that a discrimination free workplace is maintained. Therefore, the law has placed a greater responsibility on Officers, Managers and Supervisors to act when they observe or learn of a potential sexual harassment situation.

It is the responsibility of all Fire Department Officers, Managers and Supervisors to ensure that their workplace is in full compliance with the Department's sexual harassment prevention policy and to take all necessary steps to prevent, stop and report sexual harassment. This includes setting the tone for a harassment-free work environment by informing new members of the Department's policy, periodically reiterating this policy to all subordinate staff and journalizing these efforts, and ensuring that members receive all mandated sexual harassment training and all related, distributed materials in accordance with the Fire Chief's direction.

Throughout each member's career, policies are reinforced in a variety of ways. For example, recently, the In-Service Training Center released a series of video vignettes that showcased poor performance and proper practices related to the prevention, recognition, and reporting of inappropriate workplace behavior.

**3. Investigators must receive additional training, especially related to investigating disparate treatment allegations, and cases in which multiple**

**allegations are made between a few members.**

As a result of this 2023 recommendation, the PSD hired Liebert, Cassidy Whitmore (LCW) to conduct multiple training sessions for PSD Investigators. Training was conducted on the following dates and included the following topics

- 5/12/25 - LCW Advanced Investigation Training.
- 6/11/24 & 6/12/24 - Core Principles, Skills & Practices for Conducting Effective Workplace Investigations. All PSD investigators received this training, which fulfills all of the requirements to be a certified EEO investigator per the CA Civil Rights Department.
- Additionally, in 2024, the City Attorney's Office conducted multiple in-person training sessions at PSD on presenting the Board of Rights.

**4. The Department must instill in members an understanding that the Department is a workplace, not a home or a family, where all related rules, laws, policies and procedures apply. This should begin with language such as “Fire Station” rather than “Fire House,” and “Assignment” rather than “House.”**

The standing compendium of LAFD policy, and the express leader's intent from the current Interim Fire Chief make it very clear that the LAFD work locations are held to a high standard of professionalism. At no point in any official LAFD literature is a work location called anything but an “Assignment” or “Fire Station.”

**CONCLUSION**

This report has shown that the LAFD maintains the firm position of the City of Los Angeles on zero tolerance for sexual harassment. All members are trained to recognize and stop the action immediately, report it properly, and prevent a recurrence. The Interim Fire Chief has given clear direction to all members and has taken tangible actions to reduce cases of sexual harassment. Moving forward, the current Independent Assessor could perform an updated assessment. Data collected in the previous report is now twelve years old. An accurate assessment of the LAFD could ensure that all members share a commitment to zero tolerance of any form of sexual harassment.

Board Report prepared by Battalion Chief Eric Roberts, Planning Section.

