

LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



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INTERIM FIRE CHIEF

March 11, 2025

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 25-016

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners
FROM:  Ronnie R. Villanueva, Interim Fire Chief
SUBJECT: PROPOSED TEMPORARY CHIEF OFFICER EDUCATION MINIMUM REQUIREMENT MODIFICATION

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 Withdrawn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

While a bachelor's degree has traditionally been viewed as a crucial credential for professional advancement, the evolving dynamics of today's fire service along with an increasing focus on practical skills, leadership experience, and industry expertise highlight the need for a more flexible and inclusive approach to candidate evaluation.

This issue is evident within the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD), where 85 Chief Officers currently serve. However, only 19 Assistant Chiefs and/or Battalion Chiefs meet the existing educational and experience requirements for promotion to Fire Deputy Chief or Fire Chief Deputy. This limitation significantly narrows the pool of eligible candidates, despite many having the operational expertise, leadership skills, and extensive experience required to excel in these roles.

In today's fire service, demonstrated competencies, problem-solving abilities, and leadership acumen are often prioritized over formal academic credentials. Moreover, adopting a skills-based approach to promotions and hiring can enhance diversity by ensuring that highly qualified candidates who have honed their expertise through years of hands-on experience are not unjustly excluded from advancement opportunities.

Temporarily suspending the bachelor's degree requirement for one year would allow the LAFD to broaden its applicant pool without compromising the leadership experience and qualifications necessary for success.

Over the next two years, the LAFD will see a 73% increase in the number of eligible Chief Officers who will meet the education and experience requirements to qualify for promotion to Fire Deputy Chief and Fire Chief Deputy. In the interim, pausing the education requirement and expanding the pool of applicants will help ensure that the LAFD can meet its operational goals and continue delivering high-quality service to the citizens of Los Angeles.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board:

Approve the modifications to the minimum qualifications for the Fire Deputy Chief and Fire Chief Deputy positions.

DISCUSSION

The current requirements for Fire Deputy Chief and Fire Chief Deputy positions are:

Deputy Chief		Chief Deputy	
Education Requirement:	Bachelor's Degree	Education Requirement:	Bachelor's Degree
Experience Requirement:	4 Years Chief Officer	Experience Requirement:	4 Years Chief Officer

The proposed requirements for Fire Deputy Chief and Fire Chief Deputy positions are:

Deputy Chief		Chief Deputy	
Education Requirement:	N/A	Education Requirement:	N/A
Experience Requirement:	4 Years Chief Officer	Experience Requirement:	4 Years Chief Officer

It is proposed that the minimum education requirements for the positions of Fire Deputy Chief and Fire Chief Deputy, as outlined above, be temporarily implemented for one year. At the conclusion of this period, the education and experience requirements would return to the current established standards.

Any chief officer appointed under this modification must obtain a bachelor's degree within four years of their appointment. Failure to meet this requirement will result in reversion to their previous civil service classification.

CONCLUSION

Temporarily suspending the bachelor's degree requirement for one year is essential to ensure that selections for Fire Deputy Chief and Fire Chief Deputy are based on the relevant competencies and leadership abilities needed for success. Given the small applicant pool, many experienced candidates with proven operational expertise are excluded solely due to the degree requirement. By suspending this requirement, the LAFD can expand its pool of eligible candidates, prioritizing hands-on experience and leadership skills, ultimately strengthening the department's leadership and operational effectiveness.

Board report prepared by Patrick Leonard, Battalion Chief, Employee Relations Officer.