

FROM

NAME & TITLE	Niles R. Ford, PhD, Chief of Fire Department
AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Baltimore City Fire Department 401 East Fayette St. -21202
SUBJECT	City Council Bill #21-0033R Investigative Hearing – Women in Public Safety: Leveling the Playing Field

CITY OF
BALTIMORE
MEMO



TO

**The Honorable Nick J. Mosby, President
And All Members of the Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 408**

DATE:
April 19, 2021

FOR the purpose of requesting that the Chief of the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Commissioner of the Baltimore Police Department, and the Director of the Department of Human Resources come before the Baltimore City Council to provide information about their agencies' strategy to recruit, retain, mentor, and promote more women.

The Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) is one of the first established fire services in the United States. BCFD has a long and storied legacy of bravery, however, like most large, urban departments, it remained a mostly white male institution until the latter part of the 20th century. While the BCFD has made great strides in creating a department that is more reflective of the community it serves, the department is committed to do more to recruit, retain, mentor and promote more women.

Since 2015, BCFD has made a concerted effort to recruit a more diverse group of candidates into the fire service. Some of those initiatives included direct contact with community associations, involvement of community members on interview panels, outreach to local high schools, interviews with local news media, and engagement through social media. While those efforts led to Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Paramedic, and EMT Firefighter (EMT-FF) classes that had a greater number of women graduates (22% average), the department recognizes that a more targeted approach to recruitment may lead to higher numbers of women candidates.

Camp Spark was created in Summer of 2018 as a 2-day weekend, free camp targeting girls. It was a great success and was repeated in 2019 with an added orientation on Friday night. The department hopes to continue this camp next summer. In the past, BCFD had a cadet program with a mixed level of success. The department is currently consulting on ways to revamp our work with high school students to further develop the path to fire service. The programs with the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) have not been as successful as desired. However, it is significant to note that 65% of the community aides who came from the High School program and who ultimately were hired as full-time employees by BCFD were women. The department is committed to continuing to work to find the right program that benefits both BCPSS and BCFD. The Public Information Officer (PIO) is also working with women within the department to create videos and other materials to showcase women in the fire service, as well as training videos with a focus on women to aid recruits in preparing for the Physical Agility Test (PAT).

A key component of retaining women in the department is changing the conditions. BCFD is currently working with an advisory group of women within the department known as Phoenix. They are looking at ways to improve the conditions for women, while at the same time maintaining the standards the group feels is required to be successful.

BCFD is renovating fire stations to improve the physical conditions, making stations more accommodating for women. With the renovations, fire stations now offer separate bathrooms and showers, and partitions in sleeping areas. The Phoenix group is also working with vendors on finding turnout gear and uniforms that provide a better cut and fit for the women of the department.

In addition to changing the conditions within the department, it is vitally important to change the culture. In 2021, the department hired a full-time equity coordinator, whose role will be to work with groups like Phoenix to bring about positive changes within the culture. Increasing the number of women in the BCFD is one of the primary goals of this new position. The members of the department are currently supporting Community Aides entering the fire department by serving as mentors to assist with their transitional phase into membership. As mentors, BCFD members provide a deeper insight into the fire service, help to identify career development and growth opportunities, establish goals, while encouraging and motivating their progression within the department.

Promoting more women is a top goal of the Fire Chief. Structurally, there are impediments that the Chief and the leadership team are working to dismantle. One of his first priorities was to assess the promotional process and establish standards to not only prepare our members for future leadership roles, but also increase diversity within all classifications. By implementing targeted requirements for each rank, phasing in oral components and most importantly, utilizing an outside vendor to develop all promotional examinations, we benefit from a larger, diverse and better-qualified candidate pool.

In July 2019, the Chief created the Fire/EMS Committee to combine Fire and EMS in as many ways as possible; one goal was increasing promotional opportunities for women. The committee is working on a set of policies to ensure that all members approved to serve in an acting position are equally qualified with the promotion itself. The committee is working on updating and creating acting manuals on every level of advancement and supervision, in both Fire and EMS.

BCFD is proud of the efforts made so far to increase the number of women within the department, but realize we have much more work to do to have the department reflect the Baltimore City Community. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Baltimore City Council on improving equity and inclusion within our ranks.

The Baltimore City Fire Department has no objections to City Council Bill 21-0033R.