



BILL SYNOPSIS

Committee: Public Safety and Government Operations

Bill 21-0033R

**Investigative Hearing –
Women in Public Safety: Leveling the Playing Field**

Sponsor: Councilmember McCray

Introduced: February 8, 2021

Purpose:

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.

Effective: None

Agency Reports

Law Department	Favorable
Department of Finance	Favorable
Police Department	
Fire Department	Favorable
Department of Human Resources	Favorable

Analysis

Background

Baltimore City Fire Department was established in 1797.

- December 29, 1978 Bertha Butler was hired as the first woman paramedic in the history of the fire department.
- In 1987 Andrea McFarland was hired as the first woman firefighter in the history of the fire department.
- In 1994 Vernese Hilton became the first woman promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in fire suppression.
- In 2007 Laura Shiloh became the first woman promoted to Battalion Chief in the Emergency Medical Services division.
- In the fall of 2017 Mya McConnell became the first woman promoted to Battalion Chief in Fire Suppression.
- In April of 2020 Laura Shiloh again made history when she was promoted to Deputy Chief, becoming the first woman in the history of the department to rise through the ranks and be appointed to the fire departments executive staff.

Fire Service

In July of 1973 Sandra Forcier was hired as a Public Safety Officer in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a combination position serving as a police officer and firefighter. The following year, in March of 1974 Judith Livers was hired by the Arlington County Fire Department in Virginia and became the first woman career firefighter in the world. Since females entered the fire service profession minimal progress has been made as was shown in a report published by the National Fire Protection Association for data compiled between 2011 and 2015. Those statistics showed that women made up roughly 4.6% of firefighters in the United States. In a survey produced by the International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services the following list highlights some of the major issues that women encounter working in the profession:

- Ill-fitting equipment (80% surveyed agreed);
- Lack of Facilities (50% surveyed agreed);
- Barriers to promotions/advancement;
- Work twice as hard to prove themselves to male colleagues (53% surveyed agreed);
- Harassment (85% surveyed agreed).

Study's report that the first step towards recruiting and retaining women in the fire service is creating a culture of inclusivity. This is about creating a safe workplace where employees work as a team and actions such as harassment and intimidation are not tolerated. Creating a safe workplace begins with establishing equitable policies that not only lay out the rules, but promote the organizations values, integrity and ethics. These policies should also safeguard against discrimination in every aspect of hiring, training, promotions, and more. The Federal Emergency Management Agency created a handbook which provides guidance to managers on how to prevent and deal with harassment in their organization, those steps are listed below:

- Create a clear, step-by-step procedure for filing complaints, and include a list of individuals and agencies where employees can bring complaints;

- Regularly train all personnel on interpersonal issues, including sexual harassment;
- Keep complaints confidential, and protect the victim and witnesses from retaliation;
- Quickly investigate complaints and, when necessary, discipline the harasser.

In 2018, Dr. Janet Conturs’s dissertation “Women in Leadership in the Fire Service, Law Enforcement and Military” identified 3 Key Barriers that women face in the fire service face that are not as prominent in the military or law enforcement.

- Organizational culture: The most obvious was organizational culture that protects and perpetuates an exclusive work environment that often does not include women and favors men.
- Promotional Systems: The promotional systems in the military and law enforcement are more merit based and have more explicit advancement benchmarks that are not gender based.
- Absence of equal work environment: The fire service lacks institutional policies at the organizational level that would promote and foster a fair and equal opportunity work environment. Gender equality was just not considered a primary concern in recruitment, retention, promotion, equipment, clothing or protection of women.

Baltimore City Fire Department 2020 Promotional Demographics

Fire Suppression

RANK	Total Number	Females	White or Caucasian	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino
Battalion Chief	31	1	27	4	0	0
Captain	63	2	53	10	0	0
Lieutenant	167	6	125	40	0	1 (1 OTHER)

Emergency Medical Services

RANK	Total Number	Females	White or Caucasian	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino
Battalion Chief	6	2	5	1	0	0
Captain	12	9	10	2	0	0
Lieutenant	21	6	16	5	0	0

Baltimore City Fire Department 2019 Fire Operations Bureau Demographics

Operations Bureau	Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Am. Indian	Not Specified
EMS Division	304	162	142	164	126	8	5	0	1
Battalion 1	162	153	9	137	24	0	0	1	0
Battalion 2	152	147	5	126	21	1	3	1	0
Battalion 3	197	188	9	135	56	3	0	1	2
Battalion 4	197	183	14	123	68	3	0	1	2
Battalion 5	180	169	11	80	96	2	2	0	0
Battalion 6	213	200	13	161	46	3	2	0	1
Total	1,405	1,202	203	926	437	20	12	4	6
Total Percentage	100%	85%	14%	65%	31%	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%

Additional Information

Fiscal Note: Not Available

Information Source(s): Agency Reports; Women in the Fire Service – Developing Policies to ensure more Inclusion and Diversity in your Fire Department; A National Report Card on Women in Fire Careers; Identifying barriers to Leadership for women in the Fire Service; Emerging Health and Safety Issues Among Women in the Fire Service; Female Firefighters Still Fight for Equality: We’re Assumed Incompetent”

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