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# OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR

## PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE DALLAS FIRE DEPARTMENT'S PROGRAM OF RECRUITING AND HIRING

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**September 6, 2002**  
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Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

September 6, 2002

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
City of Dallas

We have conducted a performance audit of the Dallas Fire Department's program of recruiting and hiring certified firefighters and paramedics.

As a result of our inquiries and analyses, we conclude that there are opportunities to increase the effectiveness of recruiting both minority certified and non-certified firefighters. Related opportunities for improvement and recommendations are presented in this report.

*Thomas M. Taylor*

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City Auditor

c: Teodoro J. Benavides, City Manager

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**PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE DALLAS FIRE DEPARTMENT'S  
PROGRAM OF RECRUITING AND HIRING**

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**CONTENTS**

	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	2
Authorization	2
Scope and Methodology	2
Overall Conclusion	2
Background	2
OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT	8

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have conducted a performance audit of the Dallas Fire Department's program of recruiting and hiring certified firefighters and paramedics.

As a result of our inquiries and analyses, we conclude that there are opportunities to increase the effectiveness of recruiting both minority certified and non-certified firefighters. We concluded that hiring certified firefighters and/or paramedics produces substantial financial savings. Our findings are summarized below.

- The DFD does a commendable job in ensuring human resource needs (firefighters) are met. However, some changes and additions may enhance overall recruiting and minority interest in the DFD. We found the following:
  - The DFD does not have specific minority recruiting goals. Without established goals, employees may not have a visible target against which to measure.
  - A female presence is absent from job fairs. Potential female recruits may be more reluctant to seek information on becoming firefighters when female recruiters are not available.
  - Recruiting is primarily concentrated in the Metroplex, and on-site applicant processing/testing does not take place. The recruiting section does not have a designated budget, which contributes to the travel restrictions.
- Restructuring the training program may offer some advantages. The DFD could restructure its organization to make it optional for individuals to enter paramedic training, thereby creating another career path as a paramedic, similar to the Fire Prevention Officer.

We commend the department for accepting our recommendations and taking steps to resolve these issues.

## INTRODUCTION

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### Authorization

We have conducted a performance audit of the Dallas Fire Department's program of recruiting and hiring certified firefighters and paramedics. We conducted this audit under the authority of Chapter IX, Section 2 of the Dallas City Charter and in accordance with the Annual Audit Plan approved by the City Council.

We performed our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included tests of the accounting records and other audit procedures that we considered necessary in the circumstances.

### Scope and Methodology

The objectives of our audit were to determine whether:

- The available population of certified firefighters (by ethnicity) differs from the ethnic distribution for new recruits.
- There is increased potential for successfully recruiting certified minority firefighters.

Our audit covered recruiting activity from October 2000 through March 2002; however, we examined certain events and transactions occurring before and after that period.

To develop an understanding of relevant control structure policies and procedures, we reviewed the following:

- Applicable laws, ordinances, and agreements
- Policies and procedures
- Staff qualifications and assignments

Additionally, we interviewed management and staff concerning relevant internal controls. We examined data from departmental reports, analyzed historic results, and observed operating procedures.

### Overall Conclusion

As a result of our inquiries and analyses, we conclude that opportunities exist to increase the effectiveness of recruiting both minority certified and non-certified firefighters.

### Background

The DFD recruiting unit consists of one captain, one lieutenant, one firefighter, and one civilian. The demographics are:

*Uniform personnel:*

two African American males  
one Hispanic male

*Civilian personnel:*

one African American female

## INTRODUCTION

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The DFD conducts two academy training classes each year (generally thirty trainees per class).

The Civil Service Department conducts entry-level testing for all applicants who have made an examination appointment. Civil Service sends a register of the eligible applicants to the DFD for review. Those individuals passing the entry-level test are authorized to sit for a subsequent written examination. This exam is to determine the applicant's aptitude for paramedic training. In addition to the written examinations, applicants must pass a physical ability test (administered by Civil Service personnel), a drug screen, as well as physical, background, and polygraph examinations.

Firefighters certified by the Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP) are not required to take the Civil Service entrance examination. Similarly, certified paramedics are not required to take the examination to establish qualifications to enter paramedic training. Furthermore, individuals certified in either paramedic or fire fighting qualify for reduced training.

The DFD establishes an eligibility list from a list of tested applicants once applicants complete and submit required paperwork (that authorizes a background investigation) and pass physical ability and paramedic aptitude examinations. During the interview process, the DFD will offer conditional employment (pending the drug screen and physical examination) to qualified individuals until it fills a class. The DFD interviews qualified applicants in order of Civil Service examination date: first tested, first considered. An individual may be disqualified during the application process.

Based on the City Auditor's recommendation, the DFD began a program in 2001 to hire certified firefighters/paramedics (See Opportunity for Improvement #2). For the May 2002 class, the DFD offered employment to eight certified individuals (six Anglo males and two African American males). The remaining twenty-two trainees came from the eligibility list. There were eighty-nine non-certified individuals on the eligibility list. The following chart denotes the demographics of this group.

## INTRODUCTION

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<b>Training Academy Eligibility List</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>May 2002, Total 89</b>
Anglo Male	54
African American Male	22
Hispanic Male	12
Native American Male	0
Other Male	1
Total	89

The projected demographics for the remaining twenty-two individuals in the May 2002 class will be fifteen Anglo males, five African American males, and two Hispanic males.

The overall demographics for the May 2002 class is as follows:

<b>Training Academy May 2002 Class</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>May 2002, Total 30</b>
Anglo Male	21
African American Male	7
Hispanic Male	2

The DFD could have potentially increased minority presence for this training class if not for the requirement to offer employment solely based on the date of earliest entry examination. This practice was established in response to oral legal opinions that the DFD stated they received from the City Attorney's Office.

# INTRODUCTION

## Observations

### Comparative Analysis of Minority Sworn Employees

There are 1,544 sworn DFD employees in emergency operations. The DFD sworn employees are predominately Anglo male (60%). Until about two years ago, the TCFP classified employee ethnicity as black or white (white included all races other than black). The TCFP subsequently expanded their classification to include other ethnicities. The TCFP made no attempt to adjust the ethnicity of certified firefighters listed in the database prior to the expansion of the categories. Therefore, expanded ethnicity data is only available for about 8,730 of the approximately 40,000 Texas certified firefighters.

Both sets of data note that white (Anglo) males make up the majority of Texas certified firefighters. In determining whether an imbalance that would justify taking race into account exists, a comparison of the percentage of sworn minorities in the DFD within the percentage of qualified minorities in the labor market is required. In this case, the information we obtained from the Dallas Public Information Office included the entire population of the City of Dallas from the 2000 census. We were unable to obtain information regarding the number of people with the relevant qualifications with the general population. Therefore, we used the information from the TCFP regarding the number of certified firefighters in Texas. The DFD exceeds the TCFP percentage in most minority race categories.

Race & Gender	% Of TCFP 8,730	% Of DFD 1,544
Anglo Male	67.7%	59.8%
Anglo Female	2.4%	3.4%
Total Anglo	70.1%	<b>63.2%</b>
African American Male	18.2%	21.1%
African American Female	0.8%	.5%
Total African American	19.0%	<b>21.6%</b>
Hispanic Male	9.0%	12.2%
Hispanic Female	0.3%	0.1%
Total Hispanic	9.3%	<b>12.3%</b>
Native American/Others	1.6%	<b>2.9%</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The TCFP percentage of minority certified firefighters is lower than the City of Dallas as a whole and the City of Dallas as an employer.

We obtained the race/gender composition of the 909 individuals who were given a written test by Civil Service for DFD uniform positions in 2000 and 2001. The percentages of tested applicants in the two largest minority categories were comparable to the current firefighter distribution. These numbers indicate that enough applicants enter the process to maintain the current minority levels, but are insufficient to significantly increase the percentages.

Prior to the beginning of the May 2002 training academy, the DFD established an eligibility list of eighty-nine individuals from the pool of tested applicants. In addition, the DFD plans to include eight certified firefighters and/or paramedics (six Anglo males and two African American male) on its eligibility list. The following table lists the demographic percentages for these ninety-seven individuals.

<b>Training Academy List – May 2002</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Total 97</b>	
	Male	Female
Anglo	61.9%	0
African American	24.7%	0
Hispanic	12.4%	0
Native American	0	0
Other	1.0%	0

Individuals on the eligibility list are predominately Anglo. For minority categories, the demographic percentages of the eligibility list are in line with the current firefighter distribution. The following table shows the ethnic and gender hiring of fire and rescue personnel for 1999 through 2001 and the eligibility list for 2002.

## INTRODUCTION

Fire Rescue Personnel 1999 – 2002								
	1999, Total 78		2000, Total 70		2001, Total 62		2002, Total 97*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Anglo	61.5%	3.9%	58.6%	0	45.2%	1.6%	61.9%	0
African American	17.9%	1.3%	21.4%	0	27.4%	0	24.7%	0
Hispanic	7.7%	0	18.6%	0	24.2%	0	12.4%	0
Native American	2.6%	0	1.4%	0	0	0	0	0
Other	5.1%	0	0	0	1.6%	0	1.0%	0

\* This amount represents the eligible individuals for the 1<sup>st</sup> training class.

From 1999 to 2001, the DFD increased the percentage of hires in the largest minority categories.

### DFD Management's Response:

The department contends that it is extremely difficult to recruit and hire qualified minority individuals in sufficient numbers to have a significant immediate impact on our racial and ethnic make up due to several reasons. First, there is a considerably smaller pool of eligible (45 college credit hours) minority individuals available than the census percentage for the population. Second, of these eligible minority individuals (those that meet our requisite college credit hours), many other professions are actively recruiting them. The majority of our applicants continue to be unsolicited Anglo males. And finally, the firefighter/paramedic profession is just that, a profession. Individuals make a career of serving their community for decades before retiring unlike most private sector jobs. Due to the low attrition rate, the number of new hires each year is limited thereby slowing the process of increasing minority representation within the Department.

Improving the minority representation on the City of Dallas Fire-Rescue Department is a long-term process and will take a significant amount of both fiscal and human resources in the future. The Department has presently committed more resources to the recruitment effort than has ever been committed in the past. The Department is committed to doing all that is legally and fiscally possible to attract and hire minority individuals.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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We identified opportunities to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of recruiting minority certified and non-certified firefighters. Our audit was not designed or intended to be a detailed study of every relevant system, procedure, and transaction. Accordingly, the opportunities for improvement presented in this report may not be comprehensive of the areas where improvements may be needed.

### 1. Recruiting practices may be inhibiting minority recruiting.

The DFD does a commendable job in ensuring human resource needs (firefighters) are met. However, some changes and additions may enhance overall recruiting and minority interest in the DFD. We noted the following:

*The DFD does not have specific minority recruiting goals.*

The DFD has a desire to increase the number of minority firefighters, but it has not documented these desires into specific goals. Goals should be established in accordance with the overall mission of the agency. Goals must be reasonable aspirations, not quotas. Without established goals, employees may not have a visible target against which to measure success.

*A female presence is absent from job fairs.*

The Recruiting Unit has taken female firefighters to job fairs and noted increased interest and visits from females attending the events. These firefighters were paid overtime to attend the job fairs. Currently, males occupy all uniform positions in the recruiting unit, and funding to pay overtime is not allocated. Potential female recruits may be more reluctant to seek information on becoming firefighters when female recruiters are not available.

*Recruiting is primarily concentrated in the Metroplex, and the DFD does not conduct on-site applicant processing/testing.*

The DFD recruiting unit operates on limited funds and primarily focuses its effort in the Metroplex. The unit does not have a designated budget. During last fiscal year, the unit spent about \$45,000 for items, which included:

- One computer
- Travel (Houston twice, Brownsville, and San Antonio)
- Advertisements (cinemas, newspapers, employment guide, and radio ads)
- Promotional items (i.e., pencils, stickers, etc.)
- Job fairs

The DFD does not conduct on-site applicant processing and testing. On one occasion the Recruiting Unit traveled to a Houston job fair aimed at interested minorities.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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Reportedly there were about sixty potential applicants interested in the DFD; however, none of them appeared in Dallas to take the entrance examination. The Civil Service Department administers all testing, and the DFD has not allocated funding to pay for on-site applicant processing and testing.

In contrast, the Dallas Police Department funds an on-site testing team that includes a Civil Service representative. On selected weekends, this team travels to targeted areas and conducts application/testing processing at colleges or universities. The team administers this three-day process by appointment to ensure the completion of applicant information. The team conducts on-site testing mainly to recruit minorities.

The Recruiting Unit may not be attracting sufficient qualified applicants within the Metroplex. The base of qualified minority applicants may be increased with visits to areas with higher concentrations of individuals that meet entry-level requirements. On-site applicant processing and testing could facilitate the entry of qualified individuals into the employment pool. Resources should be utilized in an economic and efficient manner.

The DFD has stated that they are currently in the process of updating their recruiting procedure manual. Priority should be given to updating the manual and establishing procedures for recruiting and hiring, detailing each step. Formalized procedures for the entire process will ensure fairness and continuity for the applicants.

**We recommend** that the Fire Chief consider:

- A. Establishing ethnic and gender recruiting goals (after consulting the City Attorney).
- B. Augmenting the recruiting unit with female firefighters.
- C. Revaluating current funding allocation to the Recruiting Unit to enable performing application processing and testing on-site, including recruiting trips outside of the Metroplex.
- D. Developing a revised recruiting and hiring procedure manual that includes the components and subjects noted above and review with the City Attorney

**Management's Response:**

- A. The Department will consult the City Attorney for a legal opinion on whether minority gender and ethnic recruiting goals can be established. If goals can be established, we will commit them to writing.
- B. It has been the Department's practice to use female recruiters when necessary to interact with other females. We will explore the possibility of assigning a female

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

recruiter fulltime to the recruitment section. If this cannot be done, we will continue to use females, on and off duty, at every recruitment activity where we have the potential to contact female applicants.

- C. Each recruitment initiative will be evaluated in order to determine whether Civil Service personnel should be included to conduct on site testing. If funds can be allocated to include Civil Service personnel during recruiting out of town, we will request their assistance.
- D. The Department will revise its recruiting and hiring procedures in consultation with the City Attorney and include the areas cited above if possible.

**2. Recruiting and hiring certified firefighters and/or paramedics produce substantial financial savings.**

The DFD generally hires non-certified firefighters. In August 2001, the Civil Service Board approved waiving the entry-level firefighters examination for individuals that are certified by the TCFP. The TCFP recognizes some firefighter certifications from states outside of Texas. The DFD recently began processing certified firefighters and/or paramedics as a means to expedite the placement of personnel in the field to reduce overtime cost. This recruitment procedure has been informally communicated (word-of-mouth) to certified individuals in the Metroplex and the state of Texas. The Recruiting Unit has not instituted any additional communications to attract certified individuals.

The following table notes the training requirements for certified and non-certified applicants.

Training Comparison Non-Certified Applicant – Certified Applicant				
Description	Non-Certified Applicant	Certified Firefighter Applicant	Certified Paramedic Applicant	Certified Firefighter /Paramedic Applicant
Length of Firefighter Training	9 months	2 + months	9 months	2 + months
Length of Paramedic Training	6 months	6 months	1 month	1 month
Total Length of Training	15 months	8 + months	10 months	3 + months

The DFD places certified firefighters at the top of the eligibility list. Other than the eligibility preference and reduced training requirement, there are no other incentives to entice certified firefighters/paramedics to apply for the DFD. Some of the certified applicants have recently been placed into the field after completion of the abbreviated training. Success of the program will be based on the field performance of these and other certified individuals. This program is too new to evaluate at this point.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The following table reflects the potential savings by hiring certified individuals.

<b>Salary, Pension, and Flex Benefit Cost For Firefighters While In Nine Month Academy &amp; Six Month Paramedic Training</b>				
Non-Certified Firefighter/Paramedic			Certified Firefighter/Paramedic	
Salary, Pension, and Flex Benefits	Per Month	Total While In Training	Certified Training Cost	Savings
Academy	\$3,878	\$34,902	\$7,756	\$27,146
Paramedic	\$3,913	\$23,478	\$3,913	\$19,565
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$58,380</b>	<b>\$11,669</b>	<b>\$46,711</b>

The City saves a potential \$27,146 for each certified firefighter hired, a potential \$19,565 for each paramedic hired, and a potential \$46,711 for each certified firefighter/paramedic hired. In addition, the DFD accelerates the placement of personnel at fire stations and on equipment. Additional savings would be realized from decreasing overtime costs.

**We recommend** that the Fire Chief:

- A. Evaluate the field performance of the newly hired certified individuals to determine whether the program is successful. If successful, consider formally advertising for certified individuals and expanding the recruiting area to obtain a more diverse selection.
- B. If necessary, develop additional incentives to obtain certified individuals.

**Management's Response:**

- A. It is the Department's intention to evaluate the performance of not only certified, but all individuals we hire. If the program appears to be successful, we will continue to recruit certified individuals in a cost effective manner in order to attract as diverse a group possible while not exceeding 50% of our new hires.
- B. If it becomes necessary, the Department will explore what, if any, incentives exist within the City's Administrative Directives and Personnel Rules that might be offered.

**3. Restructuring the training program offers some advantages.**

Firefighters are required to complete the necessary training to be certified by the TCFP. The DFD training academy includes TCFP firefighter training that meets certification requirements, emergency medical technician (EMT) training, and paramedic training. The entire course takes 15 months (nine months for fire fighting and EMT training and certification, six months for paramedic training).

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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The DFD assigns recruits to fire stations after they complete the fire fighting and EMT training segments. The recruits subsequently attend paramedic training on their days off, being paid overtime. This schedule results in reducing overtime payments to staff fire stations. The department's goal is for all firefighters to become paramedics.

While most trainees successfully complete the requirements to be a firefighter/paramedic, some do not. The majority of trainee failures occur in paramedic training. As a result of a lawsuit settlement, the DFD allows trainees who do not initially pass paramedic training to re-take this training. Thus, the DFD could invest twenty-one months of training at an approximate salary cost of \$81,858 for each individual who retakes the paramedic training.

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of persons that take the paramedic exam final for the first time do not pass; nineteen percent (19%) of those that take the exam a second time do not pass.

Since January 1999, there have been 185 students enrolled in the paramedic training class. One hundred thirty-three passed the training on the initial attempt (and are currently assigned to stations). However, 52 (28%) of the 185 trainees failed. These 52 trainees retook the paramedic training, and 10 failed and were terminated. The overall failure rate equaled 5.4%. The cost of the retraining for the 52 trainees is approximately \$1,220,856. Of that amount, approximately \$234,780 was expended on the 10 terminated trainees.

The DFD could restructure its organization to make it optional for individuals to enter paramedic training, thereby creating another career path as a paramedic, similar to the Fire Prevention Officer.

Under this structure, the DFD may experience paramedic shortages if trainees do not wish to enter paramedic training. Providing additional incentive to become paramedics may minimize this potential shortage. Paramedics receive certification pay (\$25 a month) and assignment pay (\$150 to \$350) when assigned to ambulance duty. Additionally, individuals receive college credit hours for passing paramedic training. These hours translate into additional education pay. The DFD could create a lower grade for those who do not become certified paramedics.

Some of the advantages and disadvantages are discussed below.

### *Advantages*

- All trainees passing the fire fighting training could be assigned to a station.
- Trainees would decide which career path to pursue, fire fighting or paramedic, and then attend the appropriate training program.
- Total time to be deployed would be reduced, thereby reducing training costs.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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- Firefighters wishing to become paramedics could request to enter the training at a later date or receive paramedic certification elsewhere and thus be eligible to enter the abbreviated version of the DFD Paramedic Training.

### *Disadvantages*

- Potential paramedic shortages because trainees do not want to be paramedics.
- The department could lose some flexibility in assignment to Medical Intensive Care Units.

DFD management stated that with each uniformed employee having both firefighter and paramedic certifications, it would permit them expanded opportunities to cross-train individuals in firefighter and paramedic functions, as well as more easily accommodate transfers from emergency medical service (EMS) positions to other assignments. DFD management stated that such transfers are often stress related due to the nature of EMS (operating/assignment to an ambulance).

**We recommend** that the Fire Chief evaluate the training program and consider:

- Eliminating the requirement for all firefighters to take and pass fire fighting and paramedic training.
- Creating a new career path for paramedics.

### **Management's Response:**

As originally designed the EMS system in Dallas was created to take advantage of dual role crossed trained firefighter/paramedics.

Over the history of the system (30 years), many different approaches to providing EMS have been tried. The suggestion that we should consider eliminating our paramedic training requirement and utilize only volunteers to staff EMS has been tried in the past and was unsuccessful.

Having a separate career path for Paramedics has also been studied in the past. In 1999 a KPMG audit found that the use of dual trained firefighter/paramedics provide a cost effective staffing approach that fulfills the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department's mission and serves the needs of the citizens of Dallas. According to KPMG, this allows for significant cost savings related to salary expenses. Dual role cross-trained individuals spend 50% of their time as firefighters and 50% as paramedics. The savings identified by the KPMG audit is in excess of \$4 million. The use of dual role crossed trained firefighter/paramedics allows the department to take full advantage of the 7K exemption offered by the FLSA. Therefore, it is cost prohibitive to make the change recommended.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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### **Auditor's Comment:**

While we understand the DFD's position, we continue to believe that long-term savings can be derived by restructuring training to expedite staff deployment and reduce training costs.