

1 [Urging the Fire Commission to Critically Evaluate the Current Leadership of the Fire
2 Department]

3 **Resolution urging the Fire Commission to critically evaluate the current leadership of**
4 **the Fire Department (Department) and carefully heed the messages of the Department’s**
5 **employee organizations in light of the ongoing Emergency Medical Services crisis**
6 **within the Department.**

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8 WHEREAS, Per 1997’s Board Resolution 369-97, on file with the Clerk of the Board of
9 Supervisors in File No. 30-97-3, the San Francisco Fire Department is charged with providing
10 “the residents and visitors of San Francisco a faster and more coordinated response to
11 emergency medical calls, multi-casualty incidents, and disasters”; and

12 WHEREAS, Per its Exclusive Operating Area (EOA) with the State of California
13 Emergency Medical Services Authority, the San Francisco Fire Department must respond to
14 80% of the emergency calls for ambulance services in the City; and

15 WHEREAS, Per its own guidelines, the Fire Department is supposed to have
16 ambulances on the scene of Code 3 emergencies within 10 minutes 90% of the time; and

17 WHEREAS, The Fire Department is currently failing all three of these measures; and

18 WHEREAS, In July and August of 2014 the Fire Department’s 90th percentile response
19 time to Code 3 medical emergencies was 14.7 and 14.65 minutes respectively, nearly 50%
20 longer than the Department’s own standard; and

21 WHEREAS, Since the state reestablished the EOA in January of 2012, the Fire
22 Department has only responded to 69% and 73% of emergency medical calls in 2012 and
23 2013, well below the required 80%; and

24 WHEREAS, There were 374 occasions when it took more than 20 minutes for an
25 ambulance to arrive—in August of 2014 alone; and

1 WHEREAS, “Medic-to-follow” calls, when the Fire Department literally does not have
2 an ambulance available to send to someone in need, have increased over 500% since 2008,
3 averaging eight times per day in 2013 and spiking dramatically since; and

4 WHEREAS, The Fire Department’s ambulance shortage is a public health crisis that
5 jeopardizes the safety of San Franciscans; and

6 WHEREAS, To explain these problems, Fire Department leadership consistently cites
7 funding shortages; and

8 WHEREAS, Yet the Fire Department’s budget has increased \$63,000,000, or 22.4%, in
9 the last five years; and

10 WHEREAS, In the last three annual budgets, the Board of Supervisors has
11 appropriated funds for the Fire Department to purchase 16 new ambulances, but as of the
12 introduction of the Resolution, the Department has still not completed the purchase or put a
13 single one into service; and

14 WHEREAS, Emergency Medical Services is not the only area of concern at the Fire
15 Department; and

16 WHEREAS, Administrative failures, played out over five years between 2008 and 2013,
17 caused the Fire Department to lose nearly \$10,000,000 in federal grant money toward a new
18 fire boat; and

19 WHEREAS, Discrimination claims continue to haunt the Fire Department, with a jury
20 recently awarding \$3,700,000 to 15 firefighters who sued for age discrimination in promotions,
21 and with the Budget and Legislative Analyst reporting in January that “confidence in the
22 fairness of the promotional process has not improved; the City currently has three pending
23 lawsuits challenging promotional exams”; and

24 WHEREAS, Fire Department leaders have undermined both Transit First and Vision
25 Zero goals, and been reluctant to support initiatives and projects designed to increase

1 pedestrian safety, arguing that adopted City codes, policies, and standards that promote
2 street safety improvements do not apply to the Fire Department; and

3 WHEREAS, Unlike almost every other City department, the Fire Department lacks
4 basic succession plans, or five year strategic plans, or fleet replacement plans; and

5 WHEREAS, In light of all these failings, morale within the Fire Department is at a
6 perilous, all-time low; and

7 WHEREAS, On September 22, 2014, the United Employee Groups of the San
8 Francisco Fire Department, including those representing Asian, Black, Hispanic, LGBT, and
9 female firefighters and medics, unanimously voted to express a “crisis of confidence” in the
10 Department leadership and urge the Mayor to immediately relieve the Fire Chief; and

11 WHEREAS, On October 1, 2014, the San Francisco Fire Chief’s Association informed
12 the Mayor it stood with the United Employee Groups, echoing their “crisis of confidence”, and
13 specifically calling for the replacement of the current Fire Chief; and

14 WHEREAS, The rank-and-file of the Fire Department have appealed not to their Chief,
15 but to the Mayor, the Fire Commission, and the public; and

16 WHEREAS, As Colin Powell said, “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is
17 the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help
18 them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership”; and

19 WHEREAS, Both the Mayor and Members of the Board of Supervisors are limited to
20 two four-year terms, on the premise that leadership turnover is good for the City; and

21 WHEREAS, The current Fire Chief has held the position for over ten years; and

22 WHEREAS, While the Mayor’s ambulance working group, convened to address the
23 ongoing ambulance crisis, is making progress, this crisis was entirely foreseen and Fire
24 Department leaders should never have allowed it to so thoroughly devolve; and

25 WHEREAS, The slow acquisition of ambulances, the cancellation of effective

1 community paramedicine programs, the underinvestment in EMS logistics improvements, and
2 the lack of collaboration with other City Departments on nuanced system improvements until
3 after the ambulance crisis peaked constitute managerial failures that have undermined public
4 safety; and

5 WHEREAS, Section 2.114 of the San Francisco Charter prevents the Board of
6 Supervisors from undertaking personnel decisions regarding department heads; and

7 WHEREAS, Under Charter Section 4.102 this responsibility lies with the Mayor and the
8 Fire Commission; and

9 WHEREAS, The Fire Commission has begun an evaluation of the Fire Chief; now,
10 therefore, be it

11 RESOLVED, That in light of the acute ambulance crisis, the unanimous breakdown of
12 morale, and all the other administrative concerns at the Fire Department, the Board of
13 Supervisors urges the Fire Commission to very critically evaluate the current leadership of the
14 Fire Department and carefully heed the messages of the Department's employee
15 organizations.

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