



CITY OF HOUSTON

Fire Department

Promoting Excellence as the World's Largest Accredited Municipal Fire Agency

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Committee on Urban Affairs
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

RE: Houston Fire Department Support for HB 3398

Dear Texas House Committee on Urban Affairs,

The Houston Fire Department fully supports the Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP)'s mission "to aid in the protection of lives and property of Texas citizens through the development and enforcement of recognized professional standards for individuals and the fire service," especially how it impacts firefighter health and safety. Joined in our support of HB 3398 are fire chiefs from a majority of the 25 largest municipal fire departments in the state, as well as several volunteer departments and prevention-only agencies.

Our advocacy and call to restructure TCFP's governing board is grounded in the belief that representation from individuals that have a cross-sectional view of a fire department's operation would enhance the TCFP's "ethics, accountability, efficiency, transparency and integrity" in the development and enforcement of its standards. Responsibilities of a fire department vary significantly based upon a community's profile. The corresponding training, equipment, and facility needs in a rural fire department operating with unreliable water supply are different than a metropolitan fire department without zoning. Dedicating a position for a fire chief or assistant chief of a department serving a population of 100,000 or more to TCFP's governing board helps achieve the necessary diversity of perspectives without sacrificing any interest currently represented.

Based on the proposed population bracket called for in HB 3398, personnel from over 40 municipal fire departments may be eligible for this position. The Houston Fire Department supports HB 3398 with full awareness this position has a strong probability of not having an affiliation with our department. Including the management perspective of larger municipal departments during the decision-making process, and beyond public comments, is the overarching goal and reason for our support of this bill.

Municipal fire departments – and consequently, local taxpayers – carry an undue burden in funding the Texas fire service regulations. As an example, in July 2019 the governing board voted 10-1 not to lower recertification fees arguing that the financial burden is on local governments not on individual firefighters, despite that fact the local government are the largest fee contributor due to scale. Without appropriate local government representation on governing boards, fees targeted to local governments are unfair to taxpayers and forces local government to divert resources away from training, equipment, and facilities. The proposed restructure of TCFP

Council Members: Amy Peck Tarsha Jackson Abbie Kamin Carolyn Evans-Shabazz Dave Martin Tiffany Thomas Greg Travis Karla Cisneros
Robert Gallegos Edward Pollard Martha Castex-Tatum Mike Knox David Robinson Michael Kubosh Letitia Plummer Sallie Alcorn
Controller: Chris Brown

would provide a stronger voice in discussing the fiscal impact on local governments while ensuring decisions still require the support of commissioners representing different groups of stakeholders.

The Houston Fire Department supported the continuation of TCFP throughout its Sunset review process due to its role in protecting the health and safety of firefighters. Larger jurisdictions face a different set of implementation challenges than departments where the head of department can visit each station to distribute equipment directly on a weekly basis. Accounting for these differences during the decision-making process is critical to ensure we are enhancing, and not diminishing health and safety standards.

The Houston Fire Department supports HB 3398 as a means to improve the Texas fire service. The proposed restructuring of TCFP provides fair representation across different stakeholders including volunteer and career departments and helps protect municipalities from arbitrary unfunded mandates.

Respectfully,



Samuel Peña
Houston Fire Chief