



ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY

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Brian Fennessy Fire Chief

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Dear OCFA Family:

Like all of you, I am proud and grateful to live in a country that continues to strive and evolve to make the American Dream a reality for all. As a father, I often point to that dream, reminding my daughter she can be anything she wants in life through hard work and perseverance. I believe that wholeheartedly, but as we celebrate International Women's Day, I cannot help but think about the difficult task that I and so many other firefighting fathers face when having that "If-you-dream-it-you-can-achieve-it" conversation with our daughters. Indeed, it can be challenging to convince a child she can be anything she aspires to be when women in her own father's profession are often underrepresented across our state and nation.

The power of representation aside, we know that efficiency and innovation improve when women and other historically underrepresented groups are represented in the workforce and at the leadership table. Of course, this data-driven reality does not discount the undeniable importance of men working alongside their female counterparts to achieve the benefits of a diverse workforce. And while our rigorous OCFA testing standards have not — and never will be — lowered, it is important to note that no two passing candidates of any gender or background share the exact same attributes. Instead, they, like all of us, need colleagues to mitigate their blind spots just as their unique strengths will fill holes and improve productivity in other areas. This balance, which is bolstered by gender diversity, empowers us to better serve our communities and uphold our mission.

Over the past four years, our commitment to this truth has manifested measurable progress — from our upcoming third annual Girls Empowerment Camp (the flier for which has been sent out in four languages for the first time ever, including Vietnamese, Korean, and Spanish), to becoming one of the first fire departments in the country to put a lactation room in all its fire stations. Over the past year, we also hired OCFA's first ever Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator and implemented Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Academy Trainings for our company officers and added a DEI module that will be rolled out in all academies.

Today, three women serve on our Executive Management Team, and we are proud of the women blazing trails behind them, including the OCFA female firefighters who just attended the Women in Fire Leadership Conference with the agency's support and sponsorship. And of course, it was an honor to kick off this year's Women's History Month by celebrating and saluting Kristin Crowley as she was confirmed to become the first woman to lead the LAFD in its 136-year history.

I could go on, but as far as we have come, the gender gap that exists across the fire service at the local, state, and federal level indicates we still have work to do. Here at OCFA, our upcoming internal DEI climate survey will support us in being even more intentional in this endeavor, but it will take all of us — sworn personnel, professional staff, and the citizens we serve — to breathe further life into the work ahead.

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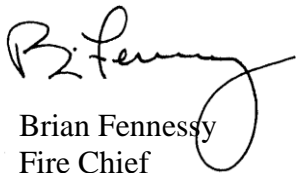
RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS AND SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

So, as we celebrate International Women's Day through the lens of the 2022 theme, "Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow," let us do so with the courage of our conviction to drive sustainable change. If we commit to that goal together, when we tell our daughters or other girls and young women that anything is possible with hard work and perseverance, they will know in their hearts that a career of success and leadership in the fire service is one of those possibilities.

To me, that is the essence of the American Dream, and I am honored to join all of you in making it a reality for all.

Happy International Women's Day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Fennessy", with a large, stylized flourish at the end that loops back under the name.

Brian Fennessy
Fire Chief