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The Future for Women in the Boston Fire Department

Two years ago in December 2018, a “Report on the Status of Female Firefighters in the Boston Fire Department” was published. The report had been commissioned by the City of Boston.

Among many of its recommendations the report “recommends seeking passage of special legislation for a fire department cadet program on terms similar to the Boston Police Cadet Program”.

The report emphasized that “due to the limited number of women veterans who can meet the residency requirement, the number of women firefighters is not likely to change without the adoption of this alternative source of candidates”.

This proposed legislation was passed by the Massachusetts legislature, and on December 28, 2020 it was signed into law by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker (the bill was H4919), “An act to create a Boston Firefighter Cadet Program”.

Similar fire cadet programs already exist in New York and Connecticut.

Although I am glad that this legislation was signed into law, we will have to wait to see if it will really provide more opportunities for women to become firefighters in Boston. At this point, I am not persuaded that it will be effective in substantially increasing their numbers in the Boston Fire Department.

Further, as long as women continue to be a minority in this male dominated field, they will continue to be victimized by sex discrimination and sexual harassment, which are important barriers to their right to be afforded equal employment opportunity.

The position of firefighter rightfully engenders respect by many members of their community because of the risks that firefighters take and the sacrifices they make in order to do their job. In addition, what firefighters can earn is significantly more than many women are able to earn in other occupations, especially in female dominated jobs.

It is long overdue for cities like Boston to completely open up the doors of opportunity for women and minorities so that they are able to enjoy the equal rights and equal employment opportunities which they have for too long been denied.

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