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October 14, 2025

SUBJECT: Restore the Department on the Status of Women as an Independent Governance Agency Under the San Francisco Charter

VIA E-MAIL: CommissionStreamlining@sfgov.org

Commission Streamlining Task Force –
Members Ed Harrington, Andrea Bruss, Sophie Hayward, Natasha Mihal, and Sophia Kittler:

I write as a former Commissioner on the Status of Women [COSW] (2009 – 2021) and a former Co-Chair of the San Francisco Collaboration Against Human Trafficking [SFCaHT] (2013 – 2018). Since December 2021, I have been seated to the Sheriff's Department Oversight Board [SDOB], now the immediate past president after serving two terms in leadership.

I attach my letter of July 7, 2025 to the Task Force initially addressing the Department on the Status of Women (DOSW) to buttress this shorter correspondence to you.

Following the Task Force's meetings throughout the spring and summer and using its adopted templates and vocabulary, I urge you to restore DOSW as an Independent Governance Agency Under the San Francisco Charter.

DOSW should continue as an independent governance agency under the Charter with primary responsibilities of addressing domestic violence and human trafficking; gender-based violence; sexual harassment; and, gender equity. This is harm reduction for the City. Some of the most dangerous calls for SFPD and the Sheriff's Office involve domestic violence. The Family Violence Council and its reports initiated by DOSW and partner agencies engaged in prevention of domestic violence through counseling and education, including programs through SFUSD's public schools. Services were well-coordinated prior to November 2020, before DOSW's primary focus was dismantled under the past blemished executive director who was removed this April. But, more than ever, domestic violence services are needed as the number of victims rose during the COVID shutdown and resources have faced dramatic cuts in funding, particularly from federal grants. These services must come from expertise cultivated over the years, providing best practices in trauma-informed care and safety protocol.

Some statistics to bear in mind:

- According to a 2023 United Nations Report by UN Women and the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime, the deadliest place for women is in the home with 140 women and girls on average killed by an intimate partner or family member per day. That is 51,100 women and girls in 2023.

Commission Streamlining Task Force
Re: Department on the Status of Women
October 14, 2025
Page 2

- From the National Domestic Violence Hotline:
 - An average of 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States.
 - Intimate partner violence alone affects 12 million people every year.
 - 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men aged 18 and older in the United States have been the victim of severe physical violence in their lifetime.
 - In the United States, nearly 34 percent of female homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner as compared to 6 percent for male victims.

Again, your support of DOSW and COSW will save lives and dollars. Vulnerable women and their children depend on DOSW's and COSW's years of effective advocacy with longtime trusted partner organizations.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Julie D. Soo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Enclosure: July 7, 2025 Letter

JULIE D. SOO
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July 7, 2025

SUBJECT: Maintain the Department on the Status of Women as an Independent and Fully Funded Agency

VIA E-MAIL: CommissionStreamlining@sfgov.org

Commission Streamlining Task Force –
Members Sophie Hayward, Natasha Mihal, Andrea Bruss, Ed Harrington, and Jean Fraser:

I write as a former Commissioner on the Status of Women (2009 – 2021) and a former Co-Chair of the San Francisco Collaboration Against Human Trafficking (2013 – 2018). Since December 2021, I have been seated to the Sheriff's Department Oversight Board, now serving a second term as its president.

I urge you to maintain the Department on the Status of Women (DOSW) as an independent and fully funded agency. The violence prevention work that has been one of the traditional hallmarks of DOSW's work has saved lives and financial resources. Domestic violence calls are some of the most dangerous calls for our first responders.

For more than 50 years, women of San Francisco have fought to have an agency that addresses the specific needs of women and their children. In 1975, the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women (COSW) was formed to "monitor complaints about unlawful and unequal treatment of women, to investigate inequalities, and propose remedies." In 1980, Mayor Dianne Feinstein and the Board of Supervisors created a Domestic Violence Program Fund to be administered by the Commission. This funding has continued to be allocated to San Francisco community-based non-profit organizations to support survivors of domestic violence and their families and include La Casa de las Madres, California's first domestic violence shelter, and the Asian Women's shelter, the nation's first shelter for Asian and Pacific Islander survivors. These agencies continue to provide trauma-informed and culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

At the end of the Feinstein Administration, COSW was consolidated with the Human Rights Commission. However, women leaders saw that independence for COSW was necessary to address issues and services specific to women and worked with Supervisor Roberta Achtenburg and Mayor Art Agnos to achieve that end. Moreover, in 1994, San Francisco voters approved Proposition E, a charter amendment that established a permanent Department on the Status of Women (DOSW) to implement work initiated by COSW and ongoing issues identified and prioritized by COSW as it migrated to a policy and oversight body.

Pursuant to San Francisco Charter section 4.119, COSW's mandate is to "develop and recommend policies and practices for the City and County to reduce the particular impacts on women and girls of problems such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, employment and health care inequity, and homelessness, as well as advocate on behalf of women and girls in such areas."

During my tenure on COSW, the Justice & Courage Oversight Panel led by DOSW, continued to meet to implement some one hundred recommendations for policy reforms to San Francisco's poor response to domestic violence and disbanded after a successful decade. COSW pushed for a full investigation after the 2000 Claire Joyce Tempongko murder at the hands of her ex-boyfriend and its review and recommendations were detailed in *Justice & Courage Report: A Blueprint for San Francisco's Response to Domestic Violence* (2002). Her murder followed several other domestic violence-related homicides that same year. Though Claire Joyce had a restraining order in place and did everything right to protect herself and her two young children, her life was taken in front of her children.

DOSW formed a public-private partnership and created a Domestic Violence Response Cross-Training Institute that brought together 911 dispatch, police, probation officers, and other responders. From 2010 to 2014, San Francisco saw zero domestic violence homicides. Previously, San Francisco saw between 12 to 16 domestic violence homicides annually.

DOSW and the San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium (DV Consortium) worked to have a special code for domestic calls to 911 dispatch. This provided a measure of extra safety for first responders – whether police officers, sheriff's deputies, or emergency services – to alert them to an especially dangerous call. The special code also allowed for data collection and detailed the unmet need for hotlines, shelters, and other supportive services. COSW and DOSW have put forth prevention education, including programs at SFUSD and family support organizations.

In 2010, COSW and DOSW undertook the first Family Violence Council Report, underscoring that success comes with a targeted, multi-pronged approach with stakeholders and responsible agencies at the table. The 28 members of the Council include the COSW president or designee and representatives from the City's agencies and partner agencies, along with law enforcement, probation, and the courts. The report also included work to prevent child abuse and elder abuse. At the time, partner agencies identified that San Francisco was not in compliance with California law in its child abuse prevention programs and response; this was quickly remedied. Until the 2020 departure of Dr. Emily Murase as DOSW's executive director, data collection soon became more routine and available to secure grants to expand issues addressed by COSW and DOSW.

Also in 2010, Mayor Gavin Newsom, District Attorney Kamala Harris, and Board of Supervisors President David Chiu joined COSW and DOSW to launch the San

Commission Streamlining Task Force
Re: Department on the Status of Women
July 7, 2025
Page 3

Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking (SFCaHT). Human trafficking has been a growing problem, particularly in major city hubs and with large events. DOSW worked to train Super Bowl 50 volunteers to identify signs of human trafficking with the agreement of Daniel Lurie as chair of the Super Bowl 50 Host Committee. Since then, DOSW has trained scores of personnel in the hospitality industry and DOSW's model has been replicated at other host cities. The City heeded COSW's and DOSW's call for increased funding needed to properly respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Indeed, funding grew from \$1 million in 2004 to \$8 million with an additional \$9 million state grant for anti-human trafficking programs by the end of Dr. Murase's tenure in 2020.

The turmoil surrounding DOSW post-2020 should not determine the outcome of DOSW as an independent agency with the necessary funding. COSW and DOSW must return to the charter mandate of a working to eliminate gender-based violence under proper leadership. Only then, will our City see some semblance of gender equity.

Your support of DOSW and COSW will save lives and dollars. Vulnerable women and their children depend on DOSW's and COSW's years of effective advocacy with longtime trusted partner organizations.

Very truly yours,

