

Draft BOS Statement
Shared with Commission for Feedback
January 5, 2026

San Francisco's commitment to equity, accountability, and community-informed governance is threatened by the proposal to downgrade the Commission on the Status of Women from a Charter-established governing body to merely an advisory committee. The central argument is this: reducing the Commission's authority will fundamentally weaken its ability to deliver real results for women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people.

Women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people face threats to their rights and representation. San Francisco must reinforce— not reduce—the institutions that protect them.

The Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1975 after years of advocacy by the women's community and later affirmed by voters. It was not created to offer suggestions from the sidelines. It was designed as an independent governing body with authority to hold City systems accountable.

And that authority has delivered results.

COSW helped make San Francisco the first city in the nation to implement Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) locally, reshaping how departments examine budgets, policies, and services through a gender-equity lens. It helped establish the Family Violence Council and the Sexual Assault Response Team, ensuring survivor experiences informed policy across agencies. More recently, the Commission has protected reproductive health access after the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs*, tracked women's representation in public spaces, elevated research on trans women, supported girls' sports

and LGBTQ+ businesses, advocated for lactation spaces in the Police Department, and elevated the voices of incarcerated women subjected to abuse.

This is what governance authority enables: action, coordination, and accountability.

Downgrading COSW is not a neutral restructuring. It would concentrate power by allowing the Mayor to hire and fire the Department Director, remove commissioners at will, and limit the Commission's ability to set agendas or issue independent findings, as advisory bodies may not direct staff or department activities. That is precisely the opposite of transparency and oversight.

Some may argue that if the Department on the Status of Women remains in place, there is no need for governance by the COSW and therefore, its status as an advisory body does not change how the Department and COSW function in practice. That misunderstands the system. Voters created the Department to implement the Commission's policies—not replace its oversight. This separation between the Department and its Commission protects independence, continuity, and public trust.

San Francisco's leadership on equity has never been symbolic. It has required courage, independence, and community voice.

The cost of silence is far greater than the cost of independence.

To fully protect equity, accountability, and community voice in San Francisco, the Commission on the Status of Women must remain independent and retain its governing authority. Preserving the Commission's power is essential to upholding our City's longstanding values and ensuring effective oversight.