SAN FRANCISCO COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

COSW Recommendations

Assault Response & Accountability

October 29, 2026

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Established in 1975 by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors following years of advocacy by the local women's community, the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women (COSW) was created to advance the civil rights and well-being of women and girls. Pursuant to the San Francisco Charter, COSW may recommend policies and practices for the City and County to reduce the particular impacts on women and girls of problems related to sexual harassment (S.F. Charter Sec. 4.119). This mandate positions COSW to identify systemic barriers, advocate for policy reform, and advance greater accountability across City government.

In the last year, the Commission on the Status of Women received multiple concerns from sexual assault survivors and community-based organizations about pending cases and the engagement with the San Francisco Police Department's investigative process. The October 8, 2026, joint special hearing of the Board of Supervisors' Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee and COSW, led by Supervisor Myrna Melgar, was called in response to survivor concerns about the SFPD investigative process for sexual assault cases. Additionally, media accounts highlighted concerns related to the experience of survivors during the investigative process. *The San Francisco Standard* in July 2026 reported that SFPD cleared just 14% of rape cases in the previous year, while many cases remained inactive, including cases involving DNA matches to identified suspects. In response to these findings and growing concerns about the City's handling of sexual assault cases, the joint hearing examined SFPD's staffing, investigative policies, and procedures, as well as the need for greater accountability and survivor-centered practices.

National research consistently shows that sexual violence is underreported, and that concerns about not being believed, distrust of law enforcement, prior negative experiences, stigma, financial insecurity, housing instability, and fear of immigration-related consequences can create significant barriers to reporting and seeking assistance.[1][2] [3]These barriers may disproportionately affect survivors from communities of color, including Black, Latina, and Native American survivors, as well as immigrant, LGBTQ+, low-income, and unhoused survivors who may face additional systemic challenges when reporting sexual violence and accessing support services. [4]Addressing these inequities requires survivor-centered policies that recognize the diverse circumstances of survivors, build trust, and ensure that every survivor has equitable access to a thorough investigation, appropriate support, and accountability.

> Building on the concerns raised during the hearing, COSW has developed recommendations that San Francisco leadership may further codify for SFPD's response to sexual assault cases, including an independent annual case review, monthly public reporting, and consistent, survivor-centered oversight. These recommendations call for coordination among SFPD,

[1] Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. *Criminal Victimization, 2024* (2025). https://bjs.ojp.gov

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): Frequently Asked Questions.* https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/faq/index.html

[3] National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice. *Just Research on Anonymous and Unreported Sexual Assault Cases* (April 22, 2022). https://nij.ojp.gov/media/audio/just-research-on-anonymous-unreported-sexual-assault-cases

[4] Basile, K. C., Smith, S. G., Kresnow, M., Khatiwada, S., & Leemis, R. W. (2022). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Sexual Violence.* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/nisvsreportonsexualviolence.pdf

the Mayor's Office for Victims' Rights (MOVR), the Board of Supervisors (BOS), the Department on the Status of Women (DOSW), the District Attorney's Office, the Police Commission, and the Department of Police Accountability (DPA) to support meaningful and sustained improvement. The voices, experiences, and perspectives of survivors are at the forefront of these recommendations. Central to this effort is ensuring that the lives experiences of survivors inform the development, implementation, and ongoing oversight of policies aimed at strengthening the City's response to sexual assault.

SECTION I
Oversight and Accountability

1

Semi-annual joint hearing

A standing semiannual joint hearing of the Board and the Commission on the Status of Women to ensure continuity of oversight.

2

Proposed Sexual Violence Justice & Courage Panel for oversight

COSW proposes a four-year Sexual Violence Justice and Courage Panel, convened by COSW and staffed by the Department on the Status of Women (DOSW), to track implementation from report to prosecution. There is precedent: COSW's 2002 *Justice and Courage* blueprint on domestic violence led to an oversight panel staffed by DOSW that helped the community move San Francisco to zero domestic violence homicides.

SCOPE	Sexual assault response from first report to prosecution, including survivor support and confidential advocacy.
MEMBERS	DOSW; SF Women Against Rape; the Domestic Violence Consortium; SFPD SVU; the District Attorney; MOVR/SHARP; the ZSFG rape exam program; survivor representatives; an academic data partner.
ROLE	Receives the annual independent review (Rec. 14) and owns the monthly dashboard (Rec. 5). It complements, rather than duplicates, the MOVR review.
TERM	Sunsets after four years unless renewed, with a public report each year. DOSW shall maintain the dashboard if the panel is sunsetted.

3

Strengthen Reporting Compliance

Through the Police Commission and enforcement of existing SFPD reporting requirements under Resolution No. 16-28, including semiannual and annual reporting on sexual assault evidence kit collection, testing, and survivor notification. The Police Commission should ensure timely public reporting, regularly review compliance, and hold SFPD accountable for addressing reporting gaps and implementing corrective actions.

4

Establish Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Measures.

Implement a comprehensive quality assurance and accountability framework to regularly evaluate SFPD's response to sexual assault cases, interagency coordination, survivor experiences, service accessibility, and case outcomes. The framework should include measurable performance indicators, periodic reporting, and mechanisms for incorporating survivor feedback into policy and operational improvements.

5

Publish a Monthly Public Dashboard

With SFPD reporting case outcomes (cleared by arrest, exceptional clearances, inactive and closed cases), days to investigator assignment and survivor contact, alongside the DA reporting charging decisions, declination reasons and time to filing.

This dashboard should complement, not replace, the existing sexual assault reporting requirements established through the Police Commission.

SECTION II

Codify Standards

Board, Mayor's office, and/or Police Commission

6

Hold the Assignment and Contact Standard.

To ensure standards are based on best practices, measurable, and enforceable, SFPD should first report its current performance against each proposed benchmark, including average time to investigator assignment, frequency of survivor contact, and the availability and responsiveness of direct contact lines.

Assign every sexual assault case to a primary investigator within 48 hours. Contact the survivor every 14 days and at each milestone (suspect interview, lab results, DA presentation). Target 100% of active cases with documented contact within 30 days. Give every survivor a direct number that is answered (SVU line, SHARP, or DA's Victim Services). Create a checklist based on best practices that ensures all appropriate investigative steps have been met.

7

Civilian Advocacy

Require an advocate offer at every stage, documented in the case chronology: at intake, at first SVU contact, at interview and before a case goes inactive. Survivors who work with advocates are more likely to have a police report taken and report fewer negative police experiences.

Establish a coordinated, survivor-centered advocacy model that ensures every sexual assault survivor has access to an assigned advocate who can provide consistent support, guidance, and assistance throughout the reporting, investigation, and service delivery processes.

8

Strengthen MOVR's Role in Community -Based Coordination

Support the Mayor's Office for Victims' Rights (MOVR) in serving as a coordinating entity among community-based organizations specializing in sexual assault advocacy, victim services, and systems navigation, with particular attention to survivors whose cases remain unresolved or have not yet resulted in criminal charges.

9

Codify a Baseline Standard and Notifications to Survivors

Require a documented baseline of investigative steps before any case is moved to inactive or closed. Notify survivors in writing, stating which baseline steps were completed and how to reactivate the case.

10

Codify Probable Cause as the Arrest Standard and a Suspect-Centered Investigation.

Police should arrest where probable cause exists, rather than deferring to predicted charging outcomes. Investigations should center on corroborating or contradicting the suspect's account and conduct.

11

Review and Clarify Classification of Sexual Assault-Related Incidents.

Require SFPD to review and clarify its policies for classifying incidents as "Suspicious Acts Towards Females" or "Suspicious Occurrence," particularly those involving allegations of sexual assault. SFPD should provide data on these incidents, clarify the criteria used to distinguish them from sexual assault cases, and assess whether reports involving conflicting accounts or insufficient initial evidence are appropriately classified.

The review should identify potential misclassification, ensure appropriate investigative follow-up, and establish clear standards for reclassifying cases when additional evidence becomes available.

12

Strengthen Interdepartmental Coordination and Case Follow-Up.

Develop formal protocols requiring relevant City departments and service providers to coordinate regularly, conduct timely case follow-ups, and communicate with survivors regarding the status of their cases, available resources, and next steps.

13

Train to an Evidence-based, Trauma Informed Interview Standard.

Certify all SVU inspectors in trauma-informed interviewing by June 30, 2027, and all incoming SVU inspectors within 1 year of assignment. Goal of 100% of all patrol trained in evidence-based and trauma informed standards within a 3-year period with updated training as required by state law.

Review and enhance training requirements for SFPD personnel and professionals providing victim advocacy services to ensure appropriate preparation in trauma-informed response, sexual assault investigations, survivor rights, and victim advocacy. As part of this review, evaluate applicable state training standards, including the referenced 40-hour victim advocacy and 90-hour sexual assault advocacy training benchmarks, and determine whether additional specialized training requirements should be established. These benchmarks should be verified against applicable standards before adoption.

14

Independent Case Review

Fund an annual independent case review**,** led by MOVR, DPA, or an independent entity with trained outside advocates (e.g. SF Women Against Rape) and the Women's Law Project as adviser. Reviewers, not SFPD, draw a random sample of closed, inactive and unfounded cases. Includes an audit of all current inactive or closed cases.

SECTION III

Reporting and Enforcement

15

Publish SVU Staffing and Caseloads

SFPD shall report annually, and in the monthly dashboard where feasible, the factors used to set SVU staffing, cases referred to SVU by case type, SVU investigators by unit and rank, the length of time and expertise as an investigator, and average active cases per investigator. Staff SHARP to its ordinance minimum of four positions, exempt from the hiring freeze.

16

Survivor Feedback Survey

MOVR, SHARP or DPA shall administer an anonymous survey of survivors who reported to SFPD, with results published in the annual independent review.

17

Consequences for Late or Missing Reports

If a required report or dashboard update is more than 30 days late, the responsible department shall appear at the next semiannual joint hearing to explain the delay.

SECTION IV

Policy Change

18

Amend SFPD's Department General Order 6.16 (Sexual Assaults).

DGO 6.16, effective January 28, 2026, governs SFPD's response to sexual assault but sets no investigator-assignment timeline, survivor contact schedule, standard for moving a case to inactive, or training requirement. The Police Commission should amend DGO 6.16 to incorporate Recommendations 5-11.

19

Amend the CEDAW Ordinance to Require an SFPD Gender Analysis.

Work with Supervisor Melgar, the Board of Supervisors, and the Department on the Status of Women to amend the CEDAW ordinance (Administrative Code Chapter 33A) to require SFPD to complete a gender analysis and Action Plan on its sexual assault response, monitored by COSW. The ordinance already directs the City to "diligently pursue all appropriate measures to prevent and redress sexual and domestic violence against women and girls" and designates COSW as its implementing and monitoring agency.

SECTION V

Resources

20

Expand Confidential Advocacy Services, After-Hours Support Services & Ensure Acuity of Case Services.
City and County of San Francisco shall ensure survivors have access to comprehensive, including confidential, advocacy and support services outside regular business hours, including evenings after 5:00 p.m., weekends, and holidays, to address gaps in service availability and ensure timely assistance.

Propose Sexual Violence and Justice and Courage panel for oversight on this item.

21

Equitable Funding for Survivor Support Services

Ensure equitable funding to community-based agencies in order to provide a robust system supporting survivors.