SAN FRANCISCO COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

COSW Recommendations

Assault Response & Accountability

October x, 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~~s~~ that San Francisco leadership may further codify ~~binding standards~~ for SFPD's response to sexual assault cases.~~,~~ ~~supported by~~ including an independent annual case review~~s~~, monthly public reporting, and consistent, survivor-centered oversight. These recommendations call for

Commented [DB1]: Jones Lowrey comments: Suggest adding information about an honest account of the economic and racial factors impacting survivors. These inequities are systemic and documented nationwide. Federal victimization surveys and academic research consistently find that sexual violence is underreported overall. Reporting tends to be lower among Black, Latina, Native American, immigrant, LGBTQ+, low-income, and unhoused survivors, often because of distrust of police, fear of immigration consequences, or past negative experiences.

[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

coordination among SFPD, the Mayor's Office for Victims' Rights (MOVR), the Board of Supervisors (BOS), ~~and~~ 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.

Commented [BD(2]: Jones Lowrey comments: We should consider adding the DA, the Police Commission, and the Department of Police Accountability to this group. This is the ecosystem that has the power and mandate to make the changes we are requesting.

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.

Commented [BD(3]: President Jones Lowrey comments: What is the purpose of this hearing? Is SFPD participating, or only the Board? Which reports would be reviewed? If it is similar to the October 8 hearing, I suggest holding it annually with all the bodies that participated (plus the DA), supplemented by smaller, more focused meetings each quarter or half-year to track progress.

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.
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. 9) and owns the monthly dashboard (Rec. 3). 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.

Commented [DB4]: Jones Lowrey: Possibly assigning it to a Board Comittee

Commented [DB5]: I like this concept. I question whether its components duplicate what MOVR has proposed. The Commission can own the annual review, but there should only be one. If we move forward with this, it would also give the Commission and the Department a signature initiative to lead.

Commented [DB6]: Jones Lowrey comments: We should have survivors or organizations that support survivors review our recommendation and provide feedback before it is finalized. We can reach out to Dr. Tate of BWRADV, Beverly Upton, SFDVC, and someone serving Indigenous women to review the recommendation.

"Nothing for us without us."

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.

Commented [DB7]: Jones Lowrey: Would this replace the report the Police Commission requested and did not receive for ten years? Would COSW now own it? We should be clear that the Police Commission has this report codified in their work, even if they have not enforced it.

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.

Commented [DB8]: Rivera suggested edits

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.

Commented [DB9]: President Jones Lowrey comments: Would this replace the report the Police Commission requested and did not receive for ten years? Would COSW now own it? We should be clear that the Police Commission has this report codified in their work, even if they have not enforced it.

SECTION II

Codify Standards

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

6

Hold the Assignment and Contact Standard.

To ensure standards are realistic, 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.

Commented [DB10]: Jones Lowrey comments: Do we know SFPD's current performance against each standard we are recommending? Given current and proposed staffing, some targets and dates may be unrealistic. Grounding them in the baseline would make the recommendations more credible

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.

Commented [DB11]: Jones Lowrey feedback

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 one assigned advocate who can provide consistent support, guidance, and assistance throughout the reporting, investigation, and service delivery processes.

Commented [DB12]: Rivera suggested edits

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 Centering Survivor Testimony as the Focus of the Investigation. ~~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 the testimony of the survivor. ~~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 Incident" 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 train patrol annually. Goal of 100% of all staff trained to evidence-based, and trauma informed standard within a 3-year period.

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.

Commented [DB13]: Rivera suggested edits

Commented [DB14]: Rivera suggested edits

Commented [DB15]: Jones Lowrey: Jones Lowrey comments: The goal here is to not define legal standards because that is not our area of expertise but we do want to define how the standards should be centered on the survivor.

Commented [DB16]: Moses feedback: Concerns around what is being categorized under "suspicious incidents with a woman" vs. sexual assaults.

Commented [DB17]: Rivera suggested edits

Commented [DB18]: Rivera suggested edits based off of consultation with BWRADV

Commented [DB19]: Rivera suggested edits

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.

Commented [BD(20)]: Jones Lowrey: Confirm this with MOVR

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.

Commented [DB21]: Rivera suggested edit after consultation with BWRADV

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 After-Hours Advocacy Services & Ensure Acuity of Case Services** Ensure survivors have access to comprehensive advocacy and support services outside regular business hours, including evening after 5:00 p.m., weekends, and holidays, to address gaps in service availability and ensure timely assistance.

Commented [DB22]: Rivera suggested edits