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WHISTLEBLOWER CLAIM SUBSTANTIATED: INVESTIGATION REVEALS OAKLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT INSPECTORS WORKING WITHOUT REQUIRED CERTIFICATIONS

Audit in 2020 warned of deficiency – yet inadequate management and oversight led to 40% of civilian fire inspectors and 75% of supervisors failing to meet minimum certification requirements

OAKLAND, Calif. (Nov. 17, 2022): Today, Oakland City Auditor Courtney Ruby released an investigation regarding the certification status of civilian inspectors within the Oakland Fire Department's (OFD) Fire Prevention Bureau (Bureau). The investigation was prompted by a whistleblower complaint received in July 2021, alleging a Fire Prevention Bureau supervisor did not meet minimum certification requirements. The investigation substantiated this claim, and further investigation work revealed in fact, multiple civilian inspectors, including most supervisors, did not meet minimum certification requirements, revealing a significant hole in OFD's management and verification of required professional certifications.

The Bureau's inspectors must obtain the California International Code Council's Fire Inspector I certification through one of the following options: International Code Council (ICC), California Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), or equivalent as defined by the OSFM, and maintain the certification by renewing the certification on or before the expiration date, which requires the completion of continuing education credits. Continuing education for each inspector is essential since the 700-page California Fire Code is revised every three years. New employees must obtain the required certification to pass probation and obtain permanent employee status. In addition, it is highly desirable for inspectors to complete the California State Fire Marshal's Fire Inspector courses 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D.

In July 2021, the Office of the City Auditor received an anonymous complaint alleging a Fire Prevention Bureau employee did not meet the minimum certification requirements for their position. The complaint was forwarded to OFD to investigate. On August 12, 2021, OFD informed the City Auditor that its investigation concluded the allegation was without merit, and all employees were "current in their certifications." In December 2021, the Whistleblower Hotline received another anonymous complaint which claimed a Fire Prevention supervisor did not have

a required certification; this was the same supervisor named in the July 2021 complaint. Due to the multiple allegations, the Office of the City Auditor initiated its own investigation and substantiated the allegation that the supervisor did not have the requisite certification and OFD had failed to properly investigate the first complaint. Given the substantiated allegation and the initial false report from OFD, the Auditor expanded the scope of the investigation and found 40 percent of civilian fire inspectors and 75 percent of their supervisors failed to meet OFD's minimum certification requirements.

Auditor Ruby noted: "The findings of this investigation are troubling on so many levels—first, our City must ensure our inspectors are qualified for the critical life safety work they are entrusted with every day—second, no one should be falsely reporting out on an investigation. My sentiments are shared by Fire Chief Freeman and City Administrator Reiskin, who have both taken this investigation very seriously, and the Chief has already taken actions to address the grave deficiencies this investigation revealed."

Unfortunately, this is not the first time the City Auditor has called out deficiencies in tracking the Fire Prevention Bureau inspectors' training and certifications. In September 2020, Auditor Ruby released a [Performance Audit of the Oakland Fire Prevention Bureau](#), noting numerous concerns, including that the Bureau has no central tracking of individual inspectors' training and certifications.

"Thank you to the amazing whistleblowers in the City of Oakland who are persistent and committed to ensuring wrongdoing is uncovered, and the City is held accountable to operate effective systems to make certain our employees are receiving appropriate training to keep our community safe" Auditor Ruby stated.

To read the full report please click [here](#).

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ABOUT OAKLAND CITY AUDITOR COURTNEY RUBY

City Auditor Courtney A. Ruby, CPA, CFE, was re-elected in November 2022, making this her fourth term as Oakland's City Auditor. She previously served as Oakland's City Auditor for eight years, between 2007 and 2014. In 2014, Courtney was recognized by the American Center for Government Auditing as one of the most influential professionals in Government Auditing.

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