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**Date:** April 11, 2025

**To:** Statewide Training and Education Advisory Committee  
State Board of Fire Services

**From:** Kris Rose, SFT Staff Services Manager

**SUBJECT/AGENDA ACTION ITEM:**

Fire Chief Certification Update/Peer Assessment Committee Evaluation (PACE 4)

**Recommended Actions:**

Information Only

**Background Information:**

The Fire Chief Certification is a capstone certification within the Fire Officer series. Recently, State Fire Training (SFT) updated the Fire Officer 2, 3, and 4 levels of certification, and as a result, they aimed to ensure that the Fire Chief Certification was updated accordingly. To achieve this, SFT along with the Fire Chief Certification Cadre, reviewed the current requirements and certification process. The goal of this review was to streamline the process, making it more relevant and effective for applicants.

A cadre was convened in July 2023 to update the Fire Chief Certification. This cadre included Chris Fowler (SFT), Zoraida Diaz-City of Fremont, Jeff Meston-Cal Chiefs, John Binaski-City of Clovis, Mike Richwine-State Fire Marshal, (ret.), Bret Davidson-City of Vista, Edward Hadfield-Rincon Tribal Community, David Caraveo-Dunnigan Fire Protection District, Kris Rose (SFT), and Natasha Cocke (SFT).

The Fire Chief Certification was established in 1998, requiring applicants to have served as a chief officer for at least one year. The certification process included securing an advocate, creating a comprehensive portfolio, and submitting five reference letters. Applicants had to provide their portfolio and supporting documents to the PACE 4 committee for review, which had 90 days to review. Following this, a panel consisting of the State Fire Marshal, a city or county official, and a Fire Chief, conducted a detailed interview to assess the applicant.

In 2006, the requirements were revised to introduce a Fire Chief Designation for applicants holding only the Chief Officer rank. Additionally, applicants were now required to have

served as a Fire Chief for at least one year before Fire Chief Certification would be granted.

The first certification under this process was awarded to Ronny Coleman on August 12, 1998, and the last certification was issued on July 1, 2013. In total, 25 Fire Chiefs were certified using this process.

In 2011, to further streamline the Fire Chief Certification process, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish reciprocity between their programs. Both agencies administer professional recognition for Fire Chiefs—OSFM confers Fire Chief Certification, while CPSE confers Chief Fire Officer Designation (CFOD). Given that both organizations use similar evaluation processes, OSFM determined that requiring a separate comprehensive portfolio review was unnecessary, as it had already been completed through the CPSE review.

Although rank requirements remained unchanged, the updated process became more efficient. Applicants, along with their advocates, were provided a series of questions to review and rate together. Once completed, and upon confirmation from the advocate that the applicant was prepared, an interview was scheduled with the PACE 4 Committee. The composition of the PACE 4 Committee remained unchanged from the original process. The interview consisted of 38 questions provided over three hours. If successful, the applicant was awarded either a Fire Chief Certification or a Fire Chief designation, depending on their current rank.

The first certification under this process was issued on October 8, 2014, and a total of 17 Fire Chiefs have been certified to date.

### **Analysis/Summary of Issue:**

SFT and the PACE 4 Cadre have updated all documents for the Fire Chief Certification (PACE 4) process. The revised documents include the Competency Profile, Competency Profile Scoresheet, PACE Interview Questions, PACE Interview Scoresheet, Demographics document, Code of Conduct (Ethics), and two certification applications.

### **New Certification Requirements**

#### **First Step, Competency Profile:**

##### **Education**

Applicant must possess, at minimum, a bachelor's degree (any major) or higher from an accredited, post-secondary institution

## **Experience**

Appointment to the rank of Battalion Chief, Division Chief, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chief, or Fire Chief in a recognized California Fire Agency. The applicant must have held this position for a minimum of 2 years. Performing in an “acting” or interim capacity does not fulfill this requirement.

## **Certification**

Applicant must have one of the following:

- OSFM Chief Officer or Chief Fire Officer certification or Fire Officer 3 certification **OR** Executive Chief Fire Officer or Fire Officer 4 certification **OR**
- National Fire Academy - Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program Graduate certification\*

If the applicant meets the qualification criteria, they must complete a 38-question competency profile and provide demographic information about their department to SFT for evaluation by the PACE 4 Committee. Applicants who successfully pass the competency profile assessment and have served as a Fire Chief for at least one year will advance to the interview stage of the certification process.

If an applicant successfully completes the competency profile but has not yet attained the rank of Fire Chief, they will be awarded a Fire Chief Designee certification.

## **Second Step, PACE 4 Interview:**

### **Experience:**

The Fire Chief applicant must have a minimum one year of experience working as a Fire Chief at California Fire Agency. Acting or interim Fire Chief experience does not qualify. Applicant must provide a letter on department letterhead describing their experience and accomplishments as Fire Chief.

## **Responsibilities of the PACE 4 Committee:**

The PACE 4 Committee will be responsible for reviewing, providing feedback on, and scoring the 38-question competency evaluation. This evaluation will be assessed by an SFT Certified Fire Chief and a local elected official.

The committee members, along with the State Fire Marshal, will serve as the panel for the 10-question interview, ensuring a thorough and consistent evaluation process for Fire Chief Certification applicants.

SFT has received a qualified applicant who has requested to be the first to complete the new Fire Chief Certification/PACE 4 process. If STEAC supports the new requirements, process and the use of the updated materials as a pilot following the first reading, SFT intends to proceed with this applicant.

As part of this pilot implementation, SFT will gather comprehensive feedback from both the applicant and the PACE 4 Committee regarding the clarity, efficiency, and overall effectiveness of the revised process. This evaluation will focus on whether the updated

materials and requirements align with the certification objectives, assess candidate competencies, and ensure a fair and rigorous review process.

Any challenges or areas for improvement identified during the pilot will be documented and analyzed. SFT will present these findings along with recommendations at the July STEAC.

As the Fire Chief Certification serves as the capstone of the Fire Officer series, it is proposed that obtaining certification as an SFT Chief Officer (FO3) or Executive Chief Fire Officer (FO4) be a required prerequisite for Fire Chief Certification. Consequently, the CPSE pathway has been removed as an option.

The cadre is seeking input from STEAC on whether the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program Graduate certification should be accepted. To support this discussion, SFT analyzed the qualifications of the 17 SFT Certified Fire Chiefs approved through the CPSE process.

Of these, 13 met the Chief Officer experience requirements and would qualify under the proposed SFT certification standards. Among the remaining four, two held SFT Fire Officer certifications, while the certification levels of the other two could not be verified. Based on this analysis, SFT does not anticipate that requiring only the SFT certification will create a barrier to obtaining Fire Chief Certification.

Pending STEAC and SBFS approval, implementation of the new Fire Chief Certification will be on or after September 1, 2025.