OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
SAN FRANCISCO

DANIEL LURIE
MAYOR

August 17, 2026

The Honorable Rochelle C. East
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco
400 McAllister Street, Room 206
San Francisco, CA 94102-4512

Dear Judge East,

In accordance with Penal Code 933 and 933.05, the following is in response to the 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury Report, *The Sounds of Silence – San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding.* We would like to thank the members of the 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury for their interest in the Outdoor Public Warning System (OPWS) and the City's broader approach in warning the public in an emergency.

We agree broadly with the core elements of the Jury's findings, particularly the importance of a robust, accessible, and clear emergency alert strategy. The City shares the Jury's view that the public should know what emergency channels and resources are available to them and have transparency regarding the City's ongoing work to enhance its alert and warning programs. We also agree that different types of emergencies call for different protective actions and approaches. The City reaches the public today through Wireless Emergency Alerts, AlertSF, broadcast channels, field-based notifications, and social media while maintaining preparedness guidance through ReadySF in the City's threshold languages. As we have consistently done, we will continue to enhance our City's strong emergency alert and warning systems.

The City does, however, disagree with some of the Jury's findings and recommendations on the best ways to address these issues. We do not agree that the City has been unclear on the status of the Outdoor Public Warning System (OPWS). The Department of Emergency Management (DEM) has spoken publicly about the system on numerous occasions and has responded to inquiries from residents, elected officials, and the press. We also disagree that DEM must provide a formal recommendation to the City's elected leadership on whether to restore or retire the OPWS. While we appreciate the recommendation, determining the future of OPWS depends on various factors and a contextual, cross-departmental analysis. This decision must be evaluated against the City's other emergency response needs and made in coordination with the City's planning process and elected and departmental leadership.

Finally, the Jury recommended that the Department of Public Works (DPW) remove or secure any remnant siren hardware that presents a physical safety hazard. The Department of Technology (DT) has been addressing any unsafe conditions in the siren infrastructure. Given current resource constraints, DT expects to complete this work over the next 24 months. DPW stands ready to support DT in this effort and will provide whatever assistance is needed to help complete the work safely and as expeditiously as resources allow.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Civil Grand Jury report findings and recommendations. Detailed responses from the Mayor's Office, Department of Emergency Management, and San Francisco Public Works are attached.

Sincerely,

Daniel Lurie
Mayor

Carla Short
Director, San Francisco Public Works

Mary Ellen Carroll
Executive Director, Department of Emergency Management

Report Title [Publication Date]	**F#**	**Finding**	**Respondent Assigned by CGJ [Response Due Date]**	**Finding Response** (Agree/ Disagree)	**Finding Response Text**
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F6**	Any siren-based approach to emergency warnings still requires San Francisco to maintain and use its existing digital messaging systems for emergencies including WEA, AlertSF, and social media.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F7**	Restoring OPWS would add a layer of infrastructure and operational complexity to emergency warnings without providing the specific, actionable instructions that discourage milling behavior.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Disagree partially	DEM agrees that sirens do not deliver the specific, actionable instructions that reduce milling, and that any restoration would add infrastructure and operational complexity. DEM does not accept the implication that a siren layer therefore lacks value. As DEM has publicly recognized, outdoor sirens can provide a useful additional layer of redundancy and public attention, particularly for no-notice events or when digital channels are degraded.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F9**	The status quo, in which OPWS is inoperable and no institutional actor has committed to either restoring or retiring the OPWS, produces ongoing cost without progress to restore OPWS or to confirm its retirement.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F10**	The unresolved question of whether to restore or retire the OPWS consumes DEM capacity, including staff time and leadership attention, that could be spent improving the city's emergency warning systems.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Agree	

The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F11**	The public has not been given a clear explanation of OPWS's historical importance or its current status, and the public information that does exist is outdated and contradictory.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Disagree partially	DEM agrees that some public-facing content is now outdated. DEM, however, has continued to maintain current public preparedness information through ReadySF and responded to numerous public inquiries regarding the current status of OPWS.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F12**	The absence of a clear explanation of OPWS's status has negative implications, including negative media coverage, and public uncertainty.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Disagree wholly	While we acknowledge and appreciate that any public uncertainty is not conducive for public safety, DEM has repeatedly shared publicly regarding the status of the OPWS from inquiries from elected officials and the media to public documents. The Department remains dedicated to maximizing the reach and effectiveness of its emergency communications and to continually enhancing its alert and warning programs.

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The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R1 [for F6, F7, F9-12]**	By 1 July 2027, the Department of Emergency Management should formally advise the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors whether to restore or permanently retire the OPWS.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable	While we appreciate the recommendation, the review of whether to restore or permanently retire the OPWS depends on various factors and contextual, cross-departmental analysis, including but not limited to how to evaluate this priority against the City's other emergency-response needs. This decision must be made in coordination with the City's capital planning process and elected and department leadership.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R2 [for F6, F7, F9-12]**	By 1 January 2028, the Department of Public Works, in coordination with property owners where applicable, should remove or secure remnant siren hardware identified as a physical safety hazard.	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Has been implemented	The Department of Technology (DT) is responsible for the physical and technical infrastructure of the sirens and its supporting software. DT has been addressing any unsafe conditions in the siren infrastructure. Given current resource constraints, the department expects that removing all sirens will take approximately 2 years. Public Works will support DT in its efforts whenever assistance is needed and as resources allow.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R4 [for F6, F7, F9-12]**	By 1 April 2027, the DEM should make available to the public a clear explanation of the City's emergency alerting strategy: what channels exist, how the public can access them, and the rationale for the City's approach. DEM should also correct or remove public-facing content that inaccurately describes the siren system. This explanation should be written for a general audience, available in the City's threshold languages, and maintained as a living resource. It should be accessible to anyone searching for "San Francisco emergency sirens" or "San Francisco emergency alerts."	Mayor [August 15, 2026]	Has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future	DEM will publish a clear and multilingual explanation of the City's emergency alerting strategy, what channels exist (Wireless Emergency Alerts, AlertSF, the Emergency Alert System, social media, and field-based notification), how the public can access them, and the rationale for the City’s approach, available in the City’s threshold languages and maintained as a living resource. DEM will correct or remove outdated public-facing content about the siren system, including the August 2023 restoration announcement.

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The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F1**	The OPWS was originally designed for an aerial attack that is not a threat to San Francisco today.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F2**	Each type of emergency facing San Francisco, including earthquakes, tsunamis and extreme weather, requires its own emergency instructions, affects different areas of the city, and has different durations.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F3**	The OPWS was not designed for San Francisco's current population, which is larger, multilingual, often indoors, and includes a substantial visitor population with little siren training or familiarity.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F4**	A modernized version of the OPWS would still depend on listeners being outdoors, in range, and able to hear and understand the language of the broadcast.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F5**	Sirens cannot deliver the information people need to take protective action during an emergency.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	

The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F6**	Any siren-based approach to emergency warnings still requires San Francisco to maintain and use its existing digital messaging systems for emergencies including WEA, AlertSF, and social media.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F7**	Restoring OPWS would add a layer of infrastructure and operational complexity to emergency warnings without providing the specific, actionable instructions that discourage milling behavior.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Disagree partially	DEM agrees that sirens do not deliver the specific, actionable instructions that reduce milling, and that any restoration would add infrastructure and operational complexity. DEM does not accept the implication that a siren layer therefore lacks value. As DEM has publicly recognized, outdoor sirens can provide a useful additional layer of redundancy and public attention, particularly for no-notice events or when digital channels are degraded.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F8**	The siren system has been inoperable since 2019 due to security vulnerabilities and deteriorating physical infrastructure without a firm commitment of resources for its restoration.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F9**	The status quo, in which OPWS is inoperable and no institutional actor has committed to either restoring or retiring the OPWS, produces ongoing cost without progress to restore OPWS or to confirm its retirement.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	

The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F10**	The unresolved question of whether to restore or retire the OPWS consumes DEM capacity, including staff time and leadership attention, that could be spent improving the city's emergency warning systems.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Agree	
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F11**	The public has not been given a clear explanation of OPWS's historical importance or its current status, and the public information that does exist is outdated and contradictory.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Disagree partially	DEM agrees that some public-facing content is now outdated. DEM, however, has continued to maintain current public preparedness information through ReadySF and responded to numerous public inquiries regarding the current status of OPWS.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F12**	The absence of a clear explanation of OPWS's status has negative implications, including negative media coverage, and public uncertainty.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Disagree wholly	While we acknowledge and appreciate that any public uncertainty is not conducive for public safety, DEM has repeatedly shared publicly regarding the status of the OPWS from inquiries from elected officials and the media to public documents. The Department remains dedicated to maximizing the reach and effectiveness of its emergency communications and to continually enhancing its alert and warning programs.

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The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R2 [for F1-F12]**	By 1 January 2028, the Department of Public Works, in coordination with property owners where applicable, should remove or secure remnant siren hardware identified as a physical safety hazard.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Has been implemented	The Department of Technology (DT) is responsible for the physical and technical infrastructure of the sirens and its supporting software. DT has been addressing any unsafe conditions in the siren infrastructure. Given current resource constraints, the department expects that removing all sirens will take approximately 2 years. Public Works will support DT in its efforts whenever assistance is needed and as resources allow.
The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R3 [for F1-F12]**	By 1 January 2028, the DEM should preserve one siren installation, restored and distinctively marked, as a permanent public safety monument with interpretive signage. The signage should explain the history of the siren system, its World War II origins, its role in San Francisco's public safety infrastructure, and the City's evolution toward modern emergency alerting. The monument should be visibly distinct, consistent with San Francisco's tradition of commemorative infrastructure such as the gold fire hydrant at Church and 20th Streets.	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable	While the City recognizes and appreciates the historical significance and contributions of the OPWS, monumental installations are better suited to locations with lower maintenance and more space for context, such as a museum exhibit. The City will explore the best opportunity to commemorate this program.

The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R4 [for F1-F12]**	By 1 April 2027, the DEM should make available to the public a clear explanation of the City's emergency alerting strategy: what channels exist, how the public can access them, and the rationale for the City's approach. DEM should also correct or remove public-facing content that inaccurately describes the siren system. This explanation should be written for a general audience, available in the City's threshold languages, and maintained as a living resource. It should be accessible to anyone searching for "San Francisco emergency sirens" or "San Francisco emergency alerts."	Department of Emergency Management [August 15, 2026]	Has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future	DEM will publish a clear and multilingual explanation of the City's emergency alerting strategy, what channels exist (Wireless Emergency Alerts, AlertSF, the Emergency Alert System, social media, and field-based notification), how the public can access them, and the rationale for the City's approach, available in the City's threshold languages and maintained as a living resource. DEM will correct or remove outdated public-facing content about the siren system, including the August 2023 restoration announcement.

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The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**F9**	The status quo, in which OPWS is inoperable and no institutional actor has committed to either restoring or retiring the OPWS, produces ongoing cost without progress to restore OPWS or to confirm its retirement.	Department of Public Works [August 15, 2026]	Agree	

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The Sounds of Silence: San Francisco's Outdoor Public Warning System and the Cost of Not Deciding [June 16, 2026]	**R2 [for F8, F9]**	By 1 January 2028, the Department of Public Works, in coordination with property owners where applicable, should remove or secure remnant siren hardware identified as a physical safety hazard.	Department of Public Works [August 15, 2026]	Has been implemented	The Department of Technology (DT) is responsible for the physical and technical infrastructure of the sirens and its supporting software. DT has been addressing any unsafe conditions in the siren infrastructure. Given current resource constraints, the department expects that removing all sirens will take approximately 2 years. Public Works will support DT in its efforts whenever assistance is needed and as resources allow.