

MIAMI BEACH

COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Rickelle Williams, Interim City Manager

DATE: June 26, 2024

TITLE: A RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, CONSENTING TO THE APPOINTMENT OF DIGNA ABELLO, AS THE FIRE CHIEF OF THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH.

RECOMMENDATION

Pursuant to the requirements of Article IV, Section 4.02 of the City Charter, it is recommended that the Mayor and the City Commission adopt the attached resolution consenting to the appointment of Digna Abello, as Fire Chief for the City of Miami Beach (the "City").

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

After more than ten (10) years with the Miami Beach Fire Department and over 42 years in the fire service, Chief Virgil Fernandez is retiring effective July 1, 2024. During his tenure, his most impactful accomplishment has been to cultivate a solid leadership team and develop an internal succession plan to ensure the continued success and continuity of the Department.

Digna Abello began her career with the City as a Firefighter in January 2005, over 19 years ago. Her skills, competence, and willingness to sacrifice and contribute propelled her, first to the rank of Lieutenant with a focus on recruitment and administration. She later excelled as Division Chief of Support Services, Division Chief of Training, and Division Chief of Rescue, three (3) major divisions within the Department. Chief Abello has served in her current role as Deputy Chief of Administration since 2020 and has been at the forefront of all significant Department matters alongside Chief Fernandez.

Some of Chief Abello's recent accomplishments were during the COVID-19 pandemic where she directed the Department's comprehensive response strategy, including the development of standard operating procedures and collaboration with health departments. Chief Abello successfully established a vaccination program that inoculated over 13,000 vulnerable residents, ensuring community well-being and safety. She spearheaded two (2) rigorous accreditation cycles consecutively yielding the prestigious Insurance Service Office (ISO) Class 1 rating. Under her direct supervision as Deputy Chief of Administration, Chief Abello has provided leadership over the Public Safety Communications Unit, one of only thirteen (13) in the world to hold triple accreditation from the International Academy of Emergency Dispatchers.

Chief Abello earned a bachelor's degree in emergency management from Barry University. She holds numerous certifications, including certified Fire Inspector, Fire Officer, Fire Instructor, National Fire Academy Leadership Certification, Incident Command System Certification, and Accreditation Manager from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI).

The Miami Beach Fire Department is privileged to have several exceptional and qualified command staff members with a passion for service. In anticipation to Chief Fernandez's retirement, and as a part of my duty as Interim City Manager, I have carefully evaluated the operational functions and staffing composition of the Department, including meeting with each member of the command staff to identify opportunities and discuss the vision for the future. What came as no surprise to me during these discussions was the undeniable, unequivocal, and

unanimous support for Deputy Fire Chief Digna Abello to become our next Fire Chief.

In consideration of the foregoing, and with the consent of the Mayor and City Commission on June 26, 2024, it is my honor to appoint Chief Digna Abello as the first woman named Fire Chief in Miami Beach and Miami-Dade County history. This appointment will become effective July 1, 2024, and to ensure a smooth transition, I have asked Chief Fernandez to serve as a Special Advisor to the new Chief through September 1, 2024, his retirement date.

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