

Statement from John Selberg
August 22, 2026

Over the past several weeks, a number of statements, rumors, and misconceptions have circulated regarding my service as Fire Chief for Collierville Fire & Rescue and the circumstances surrounding my retirement. I have remained quiet out of respect for the Department, the Town, and the men and women who serve this community every day. However, recent public comments have made it necessary for me to respond and provide important context.

First, I have today seen Mayor Fraser's comments that I made a "vulgar statement, in public about the Town Administrator." I categorically deny making any such statement. If anyone says I made any such comment, that is simply untrue.

I was hired in 2022 to help address several significant challenges facing Collierville Fire & Rescue. Among other things, I was asked to assist the Town as it worked toward establishing its own ambulance service, to help guide the Department through a period of growth, to strengthen internal operations, and to develop future leadership within the Department. These were important goals, and I accepted the role knowing that meaningful change can be difficult and is sometimes met with resistance, although the majority seemed to embrace it.

My approach was always to work with firefighters—not against them—to build a stronger, more professional, and more sustainable department. I am proud of the progress that has been made. Collierville Fire & Rescue is in a stronger position today because of the dedication, professionalism, and commitment of its firefighters, officers, and staff.

At some point, I understood that I would complete the primary objectives I had been asked to pursue and that retirement would be appropriate. While I believed we had made substantial progress, I did not believe the Department's best interests would be served by my immediate departure.

Although I had never been told by the BMA that they were ready to move on from me serving as Chief, Town Administrator Mehner apparently decided that I needed to move on. But instead of honoring my contract and the Town's obligations to me, she appears to have chosen to fabricate stories about my performance and character.

I've been a professional firefighter all my adult life, since starting as a volunteer firefighter at age 16. I went through all of the ranks, including Fire Marshal. I have been a Fire Chief for 16 years and an Assistant Chief for 21 years before that. Suffice it to say, I have experience in how to operate a fire department. The Town Administrator does not have this same experience or knowledge, which may be the source of some of her issues with me.

I have had the utmost respect for Administrator Mehner and felt we were working well together, but began feeling that I was being micromanaged. I often tried to explain how actions taken could impact the Fire Department. As a loyal Department Head, I worked to provide her with insight based on experience and then take the direction as we had agreed, but at all times trying to accomplish the goals and visions of the BMA who appointed me.

I am unsure of the basis for many allegations that have been made, such as firefighter/paramedic imbalance, addressing personnel matters, or emergency management coordination/training. I have continued to address those issues as daily operational matters but am unaware of any issues that are not being addressed.

Administrator Mehner also stated that we didn't have Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Ambulances. The Fire Department had SOPs for Emergency Medical Services and Ambulances before I became Fire Chief. Many of those were actually modeled after SOPs that I had developed at Germantown. The Fire Department also has Emergency Medical Protocols that are the medical directives from our Medical Director, which are updated as procedures change. Working with the Firefighters, we identified several areas needing to be addressed better in the EMS SOPs. The EMS Committee and EMS Chief worked on updating these SOPs and we issued new ones that went into effect July 1, 2026.

Concerns about firefighter pay has had a large impact on the Fire Department and morale. In 2024, we developed a pay step plan for firefighters that was intended to correct disparities. However, that step plan has remained stagnant for the last 2 years, even though I have made proposals to improve it. This has resulted in many Firefighters, Drivers and Lieutenants receiving notably less of a pay increase than regular Town employees. When I inquired, I was told that it was a decision by the BMA, although I questioned whether the BMA was even aware. Through recent meetings, it became apparent that many aldermen were unaware of the issue or proposals to address this concern. In meetings with the Fire Department Command Staff, HR Director Burke told my staff that the firefighters make good money and if they don't like it, they can go work elsewhere.

I have also been working with HR Director Burke on increasing vacation time for new firefighters, as we offer less than other area fire departments. This combined with a sick leave cap and other pay disparities makes it harder for Collierville to recruit skilled firefighters. This year the BMA addressed the vacation issue and approved increasing the vacation accrual rate for new hires. But I later learned from HR Director Burke that the new vacation accrual rate was for all Town employees except Firefighters. Again, this had a negative impact on morale in the fire department.

And finally, the issue of Physical Ability Tests. To give a little background, I initiated the first Firefighter Physical Fitness Program in this area over 30 years ago, that includes fitness training and annual testing. After coming to Collierville I began to implement a fitness program here, as this was not something encouraged in the past. A fitness program is necessary, like with a sports team, to prepare them for the physical demands of the job but also to prevent injuries.

For the fire department a physical ability test was prepared tailored to the needs of Collierville based upon national standards. Collierville's test used a 10-minute time limit for completion of the test. During candidate testing in 2025, several persons were not able to complete the test within the 10-minute threshold. HR Director Bill Burke advised me that we couldn't use the 10-minute time limit for the women since he claimed it had not been validated, even though it had been used for many years.

Contrary to the assertions of Administrator Mehner, there never was a performance review conducted in 2025 where any perceived deficiencies in my performance were discussed. In early August 2025, I met with Administrator Mehner to discuss some concerns that firefighters had brought forward and I was working to address those concerns, including meeting directly with the concerned firefighters, as I respected their input. I was working with Town Administration to resolve these concerns.

As mentioned above, we spoke routinely about fire department operations. But she never told me at any time that my performance needed to be improved, other than discussing items we were working on together.

That is why I was surprised when Town Administrator Mehner informed me on July 31, 2026, that the Board wanted to go in a different direction and that I needed to retire. She advised that I needed to come up with an exit plan within the next 30-45 days. Because I am appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Board, I told Administrator Mehner that I intended to speak directly with the elected officials to better understand any concerns and determine the appropriate path forward.

After returning from the Tennessee Fire Chiefs Conference on August 5, which Administrator Mehner knew I was attending, I began communicating individually with members of the Board. During those conversations, I learned that several officials were not aware of all of the concerns that had been attributed to them or of the assertion that the Board had collectively determined it was time for new leadership. I kept Administrator Mehner informed that I was meeting with the elected officials and that I would respond to her once those conversations were complete.

On August 7, Administrator Mehner sent an email instructing me to submit an agreement by 3 pm. that day. Despite sending a letter to her and the Board, on Saturday, August 8 she demanded that I submit my notice of retirement by Monday at 9 am. or she would proceed with Board action.

In my communication with Administrator Mehner, I was not insubordinate or disrespectful. On August 10 I sent an email to the Board advising them of the situation and I continued to speak individually with each elected official. There are emails between her and me to support this exchange.

Instead of allowing me to complete meeting with the aldermen, she placed me on administrative leave without any explanation and chose an acting fire chief.

While at the August 10 BMA meeting, I told HR Director Bill Burke, who was pressing me before the meeting to get with Administrator Mehner, that I worked at the will and pleasure of the BMA and once I completed meeting with them, I would meet with Administrator Mehner. I had even sent an email to this effect to Administrator Mehner earlier that day. The profane statement that has been attributed to me from this day is simply untrue.

The events of the last several weeks have made it clear to me that continued conflict over my role would risk distracting from the mission of Collierville Fire & Rescue. For that reason, I have made the painful decision to retire. This was not the timing or the manner in which I

hoped to leave, but I do not want this situation to cause further division or disruption within the Department.

I loved the job as Fire Chief, I love Collierville, and I love Collierville Fire & Rescue. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the outstanding men and women of the Department. They serve the citizens of Collierville with professionalism, courage, and compassion every day. The community should be proud of the level of care and service it receives from them.

I will remain a strong supporter of Collierville Fire & Rescue and of every firefighter, officer, and staff member who continues the Department's proud tradition of service.