

COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

1

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

----- X

March 9, 2022
Start: 2:04 p.m.
Recess: 4:40 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING - VIRTUAL ROOM 3

B E F O R E: Joann Ariola, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Oswald Feliz
James F. Gennaro
Robert F. Holden
Kevin C. Riley
Lynn C. Schulman
Kalman Yeger
Keith Powers

A P P E A R A N C E S

Josh Kingsley, Committee Counsel
Laura Kavanagh, Acting Fire Commissioner
John Hodgens, Chief of Department
Jon Paul Augier, Deputy Commissioner of
IT

Daniel Flynn, Chief Fire Marshall
Lizette Christoff, First Deputy
Commissioner of Budget and Finance
Lillian Bonsignore, Chief of EMS
Zach Iscol, Commissioner of New York City
Emergency Management

Christina Farrell, First Deputy
Commissioner of New York City Emergency
Management

Stacy Rosenfeld, Chief Financial Officer
Oren Barzilay, President EMS Union Local
2507

Michael Greco, Vice President EMS Union
Local 2507

Michael Reardon, Deputy Chief in the
Bureau of Fire Prevention

SERGEANT LEONARDO: PC recording is underway.

SERGEANT POLITE: Recording for the Cloud all set.

SERGEANT PEREZ: Backup is ready.

SERGEANT POLITE: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Remote Hearing on Fire and Emergency Management Preliminary Fiscal Budget 2022. Will Council Members and Staff please turn on your video at this time?

Thank you. To minimize disruptions, please place your cell phones and electronics to vibrate.

To send testimony, please send testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that's testimony@council.nyc.gov.

Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you. [GAVEL]
Good afternoon, and welcome to the Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearing for the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management. My name is Joann Ariola, and I am the Chair of the Committee of Fire and Emergency Management.

Today we will review the fire department's and the New York City emergency management's fiscal 2023 budgets to understand how they address the needs of all New Yorkers.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the tragic loss of the lives of dozens of New Yorkers from residential fires in this city as well as 4 FDNY members since early December, Probationary Firefighter Vincent Malveaux, Assistant Chief Alvin Suriel, Lieutenant Joseph Maiello, and Firefighter Jesse Gerhard, who were all dedicated members who worked selflessly to make New York City safer. Our city is better for them having been part of the Department.

I would also like to acknowledge members of the New York City Emergency Management Team. They have been working incredibly long hours, operating 24/7 to monitor emergencies and to assist in emergency response, performing a job that often does not get the recognition it deserves.

The Fire Department's fiscal 2023 preliminary budget totals 2.15 billion dollars with 17,301 positions. The fiscal 2023 preliminary budget

has undergone moderate changes, increasing 36.5 million dollars since it's adoption.

The Department has had 3 new needs for fiscal 2022 totally 70 million dollars, and federal funding supports the majority of fiscal 2023 increases, primarily from the State Homeland Security Grant and the Urban Area Security Initiative Grant.

The Fire Department's fiscal 2022 through 2026 capital commitment plan totals 1.34 billion dollars and supports 291 distinct projects.

As we have a new Council and are following the peaks of the pandemic, this Committee is in a unique position to discuss how essential the Fire Department's mission is to the city and how it can be improved.

With hundreds of fire and EMS stations across the 5 boroughs, we should assess the need for fire and EMS resources throughout the city to ensure a proper emergency response and continue to look at how to best improve operations through the expense and capital budgets.

This is my first hearing with this Committee, and I'm excited for what we will accomplish over this term, and I look to build on previous hearings about energy storage systems, the

City's fire code, the City's preparedness for weather emergencies as well as future oversight hearings.

There were new needs in the November or preliminary financial plans including 55 million dollars for uniformed overtime, 18.3 million dollars for EMS salary increases, and 4 million dollars to rent additional ambulances. The Committee would like to revisit these items and others that were included and those that were not included in the budget such as the increase of locations to clean bunker gear and washing services for members, the desperate need for the Department's use of the 5th firefighter, and smoke alarm access and use in the city to ensure that we are helping to increase safety where we can.

I would also like to discuss fire safety inspections, fleet services, vehicle maintenance, and the FDNY's contracting as well as the B-HEARD program.

I would like to take a moment to thank our Committee Staff for their hard work. Our financial analyst, Jack Kern, our unit head, Isha Wright, our committee counsel, Josh Kingsley, our political analyst, Will Hongach, and my Chief of Staff, Phyllis Inserillo.

At this point, I would like to recognize my Colleagues that are on the call with us today. The Council Members in attendance are Council Member Holden, Council Member Schulman, Council Member Feliz, Council Member Powers, and Council Member De La Rosa. Welcome and thank you.

I would like to welcome and thank Acting Commissioner Laura Kavanagh and our firefighters, our EMTs, our paramedics, and the Department's civilian staff for the work that they do. I'm looking forward to hearing from the Acting Commissioner.

The Committee Counsel will now swear you in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Thank you so much, Chair. Congratulations on your first hearing.

Thank you, everyone. My name is Josh Kingsley. I'm counsel to the New York City Council's Committee on Fire and Emergency Management.

Before we begin, I'd like to remind everyone that you'll be on mute until you're recognized to speak at which time you'll be unmuted by the Zoom host. If you mute yourself after you've been unmuted again by the host so please be patient with us with that one.

During the hearing, if Council Members would like to ask questions, please use the Zoom raise hand function. You'll be called on to speak. We will be limiting Council Member questions to 5 minutes including responses from the Administration. I will call on you when it's your turn to speak.

Again, all hearing participants should submit written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

For today's hearing, we will be hearing from representatives from the New York City Fire Department followed by NYCEM which will come after this. For the Fire Department, we'll receive testimony from Laura Kavanagh, the Acting Fire Commissioner; John Hodgens, the Acting Chief of Department; Lillian Bonsignore, Chief of EMS; Lizette Christoff, First Deputy Commissioner of Budget and Finance; Dr. David Prezant, Chief Medical Officer; Nafeesah Noonan, the Assistant Commissioner for Recruitment and Retention; Chief Daniel Flynn, the Chief Fire Marshall; and Jon Paul Augier, the Deputy Commissioner.

I will now call on members of this Administration to testify. Before you begin, I will administer the oath. For each individual from the

Fire Department please raise your right hand and I will call on your individually to affirm.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole, and nothing but the truth before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

We will begin with Acting Commissioner Laura Kavanagh.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Chief Hodgens.

CHIEF JOHN HODGENS: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Chief Bonsignore.

CHIEF LILLIAN BONSIGNORE: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: First Deputy Commissioner Christoff.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LIZETTE CHRISTOFF: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Assistant Commissioner Noonan.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER NAFEESEAH NOONAN: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Dr. Prezant.

DR. DAVID PREZANT: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Chief Flynn.

CHIEF DANIEL FLYNN: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Deputy Commissioner Augier.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHN PAUL AUGIER: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JOSHUA KINGSLEY: Thank you, all. Acting Commissioner Kavanagh, you may begin. Thank you.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Ariola and all Council Members present. My name is Laura Kavanagh, and I am the Acting Commissioner of the New York City Fire Department.

I'm looking forward to continuing our great working relationship with the City Council and forming partnerships with the newly elected Members. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you here today about the year that we've had at the Fire Department and our outlook for the upcoming year.

I would like to begin by acknowledging as the Chair did the death of Firefighter Jesse Gerhard, who died in the line of duty on February 16th.

Firefighter Gerhard had a stellar record of service with the fire department, first as an EMT and then as a firefighter. His great grandfather was also a firefighter, and it was a job that he looked forward to since his early childhood. Firefighter Gerhard was only 33 years old when he died. The FDNY is lucky to have had his talents and his passion and his love of service to the people of New York.

Unfortunately, the death of Firefighter Gerhard is not the only tragedy that the FDNY has experienced recently. On December 2nd, Probationary Firefighter Vincent Malveaux died after suffering a medical episode while training at the Fire Academy. On December 26th, Lieutenant Joseph Maiello, a 22-year veteran of the Department, died in his firehouse on Staten Island. Also in December, Chief Alvin Suriel, who was second in command in the Bureau of EMS, passed away after battling World Trade Center related illness. To date, 273 members of the Department have died due to World Trade Center related illness. We mean it when we say that the members of this Department are a family, and our family feels each of these losses acutely.

Tragedy is an unfortunate but very real part of the job, both internally and among the

community that we serve. All fatal fires are felt deeply among our members. A single civilian fire death is 1 death too many, but occasionally responding to an emergency we experience loss of life on a scale that is almost impossible to imagine.

On January 9th, a fire broke out in an apartment of a 19-story building in the Bronx. While the residents of that unit were able to escape, the door to the apartment remained opened and toxic smoke spread throughout the hallway stairwell into other parts of the building. Fire units responded quickly and ably. The first unit was on scene within 3 minutes and 16 seconds and numerous EMTs and paramedics arrived to assist. Firefighters located victims on every floor of the building. 17 residents died, and 45 others were hospitalized. Many firefighters bravely continued working even as their air tanks ran low. I'd like to briefly touch upon 2 major takeaways from that fire.

First, despite the unthinkable large number of people who died or who were injured, many lives were saved due to the heroic work of our FDNY members. The fire required a massive response, and we dispatched approximately 200 firefighters to the scene as well as basic life support ambulances and 14

advanced life support ambulances. EMTs and paramedics provided immediate care and transported patients to the hospital. Among the residents who were assisted that day were 15 patients who were found in cardiac arrest and kept alive by the firefighters and medics who treated them right up until they were handed off to emergency room caregivers.

Another takeaway from that fire is the importance of our work in educating the public about fire safety and, importantly, what to do when a fire does occur. In the wake of this fire, we've had a surge in fire safety education programming, setting up events for individuals and groups in every corner of the city. Many of the Council Members on this Committee signed up to host an event through your office and if you haven't yet I encourage you to reach out to my team after this hearing. We've also produced and shared multiple public service announcements in various languages and partnered with the Mayor's office and local media on outreach.

We also know that educating citizens is not enough, and through the New York City fire code we require all residential buildings to maintain self-closing doors of apartments and stairwells. It is incumbent upon all building owners and landlords

to make sure that their buildings are in compliance with those rules. To that end, we have been working closely with the Mayor's office and with our partners in the Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development to dial up enforcement of those codes and rules. Building owners should expect to have an intensified focus on fire safety signage and self-closing doors and continue to have engaging conversations with the Council, our fellow agency, and the Mayor's office to reduce the likelihood of tragedies of this nature.

Like other frontline organizations, the ongoing pandemic has significantly impacted how we have functioned over the last 2 years. We take pride in the way that our members have risen to the extraordinary challenge and have met the FDNY's obligation to serve the people of New York, even under the most difficult of circumstances.

In 2021, the Department oversaw New York City's 16th consecutive year with fewer than 100 fire deaths. It is remarkable to think that as recently as the 1970s, the City regularly saw upwards of 300 deaths a year.

In 2021, EMS members spent a second year on the frontline of the pandemic, including as the

Omicron wave swept through New York City. Medical leave was significantly higher than usual for long stretches of time as EMTs and paramedics became ill with COVID-19 and one point near 1/3 of all EMS members were out sick. However, we did what the fire department has always done. We pulled together and found a way to get the job done.

For the second time during the pandemic, we called upon our regional partners and the National Ambulance contract and were appreciative to welcome mutual aid partners to help get us through this tough period. It's always an honor when we can send members to assist others around the country as we often do after hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires. That our fellow fire and EMS departments were willing to come stand with us when we needed it most is the essence of the concept of mutual aid, which we take very seriously. COVID also impacted the way that the fire department interacted with members of the public in non-emergency situations. Our Fire Safety Education Team pivoted from in-person presentations to giving remote programs online. In calendar year '21, the unit performed approximately 2,200 such presentations. Over 150,000 New Yorkers participated in these events, which were hosted by active and

retired firefighters on topics ranging from fire-safe cooking, fire safety for the holidays, fire safety for seniors, and messaging for children.

In 2021, we teamed up with fellow city agencies training 2,300 frontline child welfare staff at the Administration of Child Services and coordinating with the Department for the Aging to conduct educational programs in over 400 senior centers.

We worked with our partners at the American Red Cross to give away more than 15,000 smoke alarms including 5,300 home visits.

The pandemic has also driven some changes in the way that we have approached recruitment and retention during the last year. After firefighter classes were delayed in 2020, we recognized that a significant portion of the existing civil service list for firefighter remains untapped, and we have taken steps to extend the period in which we can draw from that list. In 2021, we processed 2 graduating classes of probationary firefighters. 46 percent of the members who joined the department from those classes are women or people of color. This is a critical first step in making sure the Department reflects the city that it serves.

We've also introduced some additional efforts to further reduce candidate attrition during the wait times for processing. In July 2021, we launched a (INAUDIBLE) program at the fire academy at Randall's Island and at FDNY Headquarters enabling firefighter candidates additional opportunities to strengthen their strength and endurance skills so that they are well-suited to achieve the required endurance levels of the academy.

We also created the Probationary Firefighter School Prep Program which launched in October of 2021. This prep course is offered to firefighter candidates who have completed intake and medical processing and focuses on improving and maintaining academic and fitness preparation ahead of entering the academy.

Like most city agencies in the Mayor's preliminary budget, the Fire Department was asked to institute a program to eliminate the gap. We know how important it is to the people of New York that tax dollars are spent wisely and that expenditures are made thoughtfully. Tasked by Mayor Adams to find efficiencies, we took a careful look at our spending and were able to come up with several savings

adjustments for a total savings of approximately 75 million over fiscal year '22 and '23.

The largest saving among the fire department's peg targets in this budget are an upward revision of projected EMS revenue and a vacancy reduction plan. We recognized EMS revenue above our previous target in the amount of 19.3 million in FY22 and 15.3 million in FY23 and out years. This reflects an increase in the number of transport that we perform and will not require any change in rates. The department will also implement a civilian vacancy reduction plan that will save nearly 13 million in FY22 and out years. We will eliminate nearly 50 percent of all city funded civilian vacancies. While we recognize that this is not an easy task, we will do so while ensuring that we do not impact service levels.

Other components of the Fire Department's peg include smaller but significant savings, grant reimbursements from the federal government in the areas of fringe cost as well as an adjustment related to storm deployments that will yield 3.6 million in FY22 and 4.6 in FY23.

The preliminary budget reflects the modest funding of new needs, mostly in aligning

funding with actual costs. Funding for uniformed overtime is increased in FY22 by 55 million to help the close the gap between funding and the department's actual overtime use. The department will also receive an additional 14 million in funding for fleet services which reflects our actual spending on items such as repair materials and auto parts.

As was already mentioned by the Mayor in connection with his Subway Safety Plan, the City will expand the Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division, or B-HEARD, pilot. B-HEARD teams use physical and mental health expertise to respond to individuals experiencing crises to deescalate emergency situations and provide immediate care. EMS members work in this program with colleagues from health and hospitals, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYPD, and the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health to provide care and coordinate support for patients presenting with mental health and substance use challenges.

We also pay particular care to the mental health needs of members within the fire department. EMTs and paramedics continue to experience the front lines of COVID and other crises in the field every day. Firefighters put their own lives on the line and

experience trauma responding to fires and medical emergencies, and our entire staff, uniform and civilian, are bearing the weight of the pandemic of disruptions to their normal lives and of current events around the world that hit close to home. Our Counseling Services Unit maintains a 24-hour hotline so that members have the option of speaking with a live counselor at any time of the day. In 2021, CSU added 92 EMS-trained peer support counselors who proactively visited firehouses and EMS stations. The Department continued performing targeted outreach to members who were quarantined or isolating with their families. CSU members played a critical role in the aftermath of the tragic Twin Parks fires in the Bronx providing support for members who experienced trauma. We take this effort very seriously, and we know that in addition to providing top-notch physical care for our members it is also critical for us to provide mental health support.

Finally, this weekend is Daylight Savings Time. I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all New Yorkers of a phrase the Fire Department likes to emphasize, change your clocks, change your batteries. This is a good time to test the smoke alarms in your home and make sure that all are in working order,

changing the batteries if necessary. If an alarm is not working, it is time to replace it. By taking this small step, you may save the lives of your family members or yourself. Check out fdnysmart.org to find safety tips.

I thank the Chair and the Council Members for the opportunity to discuss the work of the Fire Department. With your partnership and support, we will continue providing the best service possible to the people of New York. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you so much for that comprehensive report, Acting Commissioner Kavanagh. I want to thank you for the outreach that you've done already, meeting with me, meeting at the different firehouses, especially the firehouse for fallen firefighter Jesse Gerhard.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You mentioned working with the Mayor's office and HPD to increase enforcement of the building and fire code for self-closing doors and fire safe signage. My district as well as my Colleague, Council Member Feliz's district and many others, we have a lot of HPD run buildings

where tragedies have taken place because they don't have the inspections that they need and it isn't as often as it should be so we've seen a lot of tragic fires in the news lately. As the days become warmer, hopefully these fires decrease, but what specifically does the involve where you say you will be increasing enforcement, and what has the Fire Department done and will it continue to do to increase enforcement?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: Sure.

One thing we do is fire safety education as I mentioned. The other is we have been working as you mentioned the city level, the state level, and the federal level to look at a number of pieces of legislation and a number of options for increasing our enforcement in these buildings along with HPD so we will be working over these next few months with you and our other stakeholders to find a number of ways to push landlords to ensure that the enforcement is actually happening and that it's not just on the books; it's something that is actually happening in buildings in the city.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: The number of serious fires reaching the second alarm are higher is of interest to me, and this was reported in the Mayor's Management Report but was removed in the

Fiscal 2021 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report.

Has the department seen a recent increase of serious fires reaching a second alarm or higher, and can you commit to adding this information again to the Mayor's Management Report in an effort to increase transparency around serious fires in this city. That would really lend to my subsequent questions regarding the fifth firefighter.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: As we discussed, we can definitely look at that and see whether or not that makes sense. I'd like to hand it over to the Chief of Department in a minute to talk a little bit about how we set the threshold for a serious fire. I will say this has been a busy winter as you mentioned. Winters do typically bring more fires than warm weather, and we've seen a little bit of an increase, but we are monitoring that to see whether or not that's an increasing trend or just a number of fires this particular winter. I'll ask the Chief of Department to expand a little bit on the threshold that we use for serious fires.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Hold on a second, Chief. We need to unmute you. Apologies. Go ahead. Sorry.

CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT JOHN HODGENS: Good

afternoon. The department looks at an incident which is a considered an all-hands fire as a serious fire. As you know, most of our fires are all-hands. Rising to a second alarm, there are quite a few but nowhere near the amount of all-hands fires we have. Most of our fire fatalities, in fact, do happen at an all-hands fire, and the homeowner suffers significant damage to their home at an all-hands fire with fire damage and water damage. I don't think there's a problem to add second alarms for transparency, but I want to emphasize that it really doesn't trigger that the second alarm is the benchmark for a serious fire.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I don't exactly agree with you, but I will take your response as a professional and someone who knows because I've seen a lot of fires that could've used additional support and support wasn't sent until much later when the fire had gotten a lot larger. That leads to the fifth firefighter question, the fiscal 2023 preliminary plan includes savings of 5.4 million dollars in fiscal 2022 for removing the fifth firefighter from 20 select engine companies. These 20 companies are chosen at the sole discretion of the Fire Department and the process is built into the Uniformed

Firefighters Association's contract. The department has the ability to modify the staffing with the fifth firefighter when the 365 day rolling average of medical leave is about 7.5 percent. According to the Department, the 365-day average medical leave rate for firefighters is 9 percent. These 20 firefighters will be reassigned to different engines around the city. The savings are based on the fifth firefighter being paused in November 2021 and January 2022 as well as the assumption that the medical leave will remain above 7.5 percent for the remainder of the fiscal year 2023. Can you share how the Department chooses those 20 fire companies that had a fifth firefighter?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: Sure. I'll ask the Chief of Department to discuss that.

CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT JOHN HODGENS: We work through collective bargaining with the UFA we reached an agreement to finalize our 5-firefighters at 20. It was actually at 4 before their process where we added 5 per year. The companies that are selected are typically fire companies with a high workload in an area where, and also single engine companies which is a firehouse that does not have a ladder company associated with it, so when they receive a fire they

go out by themselves and there's potential in certain circumstances, although very few, where they could be operating alone and that's how they are chosen, by geographical area and also the type of buildings that they respond to, and we have certain criteria where we can measure where a fifth firefighter may be beneficial if the company was there alone for a period of time.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: The plan does include savings and assuming the medical leave will remain above 7.5 percent and prior to this reduction in the percentage of Omicron, we can understand why the amount of people who were out was higher than 9, so how does the Department want to work with the union to prioritize and add the fifth firefighter to various firehouses? How will you work with the union to make sure that happens, especially in areas that have large buildings, which my district has and many of the Council Members on this call have in this hear, because I'm not telling you, it's your business, you know it, it's not just response time, it's vertical response time, and we have 12 and 20-floor buildings within our districts where the fifth firefighter could really save lives, and a lot of those engine companies do not have that fifth

firefighter so how will you work with the unions to make sure that we could possibly get that fifth firefighter back for all of the engine companies?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We definitely do work with the union and are going to continue to work with the union to lower medical leave so that's a projection by OMB but if we do drop below that projection we will return the fifth firefighter to those 20 companies and so we'll certainly be working with the union to see if there are ways to lower medical leave and get below that threshold and meet the contractual requirements so that we can return the fifth firefighter. As you heard the Chief mention, and he can expand on that, when medical leave is above 7.5 percent and we are required by the contract to remove the fifth firefighter, we do assign additional resources often to those jobs in order to ensure that there are enough members on scene to address the condition that they're responding to.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Just to get back to Chief Hodgins. You mentioned certain criteria to determine where the fifth firefighter is beneficial. What specifically are those measures to evaluate the need for the fifth firefighter?

CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT JOHN HODGENS: Well, it would be an engine company that is somewhat remote in certain parts of the city from other companies because since we, through collective bargaining, the unions lost the fifth firefighter back in 1990, the department adapted its response, and we have added an additional engine company immediately on the report of a fire, it doesn't even have to be a fire, if there's a report of a structural fire there are 3 engine companies sent that to location. The first 2 engine companies team up, so that's a total of 8 firefighters that work to get the initial hose line in operation. The criteria for the fifth firefighter is really workload and the type of buildings in their response area as well as some geographical concerns as to how far the other companies are located from that firehouse.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you very much. At this point, I'd like to ask any of my Colleagues, I know various Colleagues have their hands up, if they would like to ask a question.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Council Member Powers, you may go ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you, and thanks to Chair Ariola. Thanks to everyone from FDNY

for your testimony and all the work that you're doing and all the work that your members are doing here as well.

I have just a couple of questions. I noted in your testimony you talked a little about the education component. Certainly in the wake of the fire in the Bronx, which was a tragedy, we heard sort of the mechanisms like the door should auto-close and things like that and I think a lot of us are looking at that. Also, I think a lot of us learned the behavioral things that we maybe didn't know or forgot or may need to be reminded of when it comes to closing the doors behind you and other things like that. I remember famously in my Catholic school education, getting the stop, drop, and roll, and getting the other sort of fire safety training, but I just wanted to get a better understanding of what we're doing right now maybe in the school setting, especially when it comes to young New Yorkers in terms to teach them about what should be happening in a fire and what extent we're doing, what grades, things like that?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We most definitely go into schools. I think that's, as you pointed out, a really important space for us

because when people are young, like many of us, stop, drop, and roll and close the door sort of become ingrained and that's a really important thing in terms of once a fire actually happens. You need something that's already muscle memory because in that moment of panic, it's going to be very hard to assess what to do. Certainly in New York, it's a particularly complex city with particularly complex buildings. If you live in a fireproof building, sheltering in place is appropriate. If you don't, evacuating is appropriate so really understanding where you live, what kind of building you live in, what kind of emergency it is, and what to do is really essential so we do a lot of work with kids, but we would definitely like in the wake of this fire to do even more because we think that that's a really rich and important place where all New Yorkers can learn about their building and get some sort of lessons ingrained for life that might help them and their families.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: What grades are you doing it right now? What school settings are you doing it right now? I guess I'll start there. What grades are you doing it in?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We do all grades. At the request of principals, we will come to any grade. We do aim for slightly younger kids if we're doing proactive outreach but we do all grades all over the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: So there's required training, but principals can request, you'll come in and do it for them upon request. How many staffers do you have dedicated to that?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We have a relatively small dedicated unit that includes retired members, but we can dispatch local companies as well when they're requested. We use our day-to-day operational resources if they're available to fill in where the Fire Safety Ed Unit may not have enough people.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Is there any requirement at all around training, education in the school settings?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: There is not a requirement that I know of.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, so it's all sort of not mandated but right now it's volunteer. You have a good principal who thinks about this, or a teacher I guess, they could get in and invite you to

come in? Do principals know how to take advantage of that? What is the mechanism by which principals...

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: They do. Our Community Affairs does quite a bit of outreach with principals and schools, and they are notified regularly of this and then some we have an ongoing relationship with. We have an FDNY High School also ourselves, so there's some schools where we have a really lengthy ongoing relationship with Community Affairs and we're there regularly. We often go into schools for recruitment as well so we often try to pair those 2 things, but it does depend somewhat on the neighborhood and the principal and their level of interest in having us in...

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Do you have any data on where principals are requesting, like what neighborhoods they're coming from or where they're coming from?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We don't, but we can get that.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: That would be helpful. My last question is just what is your budget for that in this fiscal year?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We have about 1.5 million dollars that the FDNY

Foundation actually allocates towards this and then if the local companies are responding, that's just absorbed into our regular operational costs.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Do you have any sense if you wanted to do it for every 5th grader, I'm making this up, but every 5th grader in New York City public schools, what the cost of that would be?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: I don't have an estimate. We could get it to you, but I think that we could do it in every elementary school with a small expansion of our existing budget because between operations and the Fire Safety Education Unit, I think that we could get a quite wide reach throughout the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: That money right now is just coming from the Foundation right now?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH:
Correct, yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay. Appreciate it. Thank you. My 5 seconds I'll give back to the Chair. Thank you, Chair Ariola, for giving me time.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you.
Appreciate the questions. I just have just one final followup question on the fifth firefighter, and then I'll move on. I just wondered how much it would cost,

and does the Department believe it will improve safety in the city if the fifth firefighter is reassigned to the firehouses?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: I don't believe we have a total cost. It is quite large, and we can get that and send it to you. It's quite significant. As the Chief mentioned, we do assign additional resources and have since the 1990s when this was initially removed so we believe New Yorkers are as safe as they have ever been.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. We're going to stay in the vein of fire safety. In August 2021, the Department began using a new computer-aided dispatch system called CAD, which was made in consultation with and now partially operated by Accenture, a professional services IT company. In late February, there was a report that the new FireCAD system had gone offline 3 times since it was online in August. The 11.6 million dollars that is currently in the budget to support the program is for 24/7 support from Accenture. The program being online is essential. It helps dispatch first responders to respond to emergencies in a timely manner. Do you know what caused the system to go offline?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: I

don't know what the specific cause is. We can get into that. It is part of our business process to know that like any large software system we are going to have planned offline time and sometimes unplanned offline time, and we have built redundancies into our business process so that when we do either need to take the system offline ourselves or there's another reason it goes offline that we can keep answering 9-1-1 calls expeditiously so there have been no operational impacts from those offline times.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, and have any steps been taken to avoid the system from going offline again? Did you revisit it with the company and find out why and took steps..

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: We always do an after action. We always understand whether it was planned or unplanned why the system went offline, and we also ensure that if there are upgrades necessary that those are made right away, especially with any new system, you're going to have changes that you want to make in that first year, and we've done so with Accenture.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Right. When it does go offline, how are the units dispatched from FDNY.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA KAVANAGH: I

will defer to the Deputy Commissioner for IT. I think he's stuck on mute. I can say in short we have a manual process for both fire and EMS that ensures that they can always dispatch...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JON PAUL AUGIER:

Sorry, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: That's fine.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JON PAUL AUGIER:

Let's be very specific about what we're talking. We're talking about the FireCAD, so the fire side of our business. We do have multiple redundancies, and we can talk offline about what they all are, but at a very high level we would be on the FireCAD application, which would be the main application, if we had to fall back a redundancy it would be something that we call CMO, which is a local server to the dispatcher so they are actually still dispatching with the aid of IT and then beyond that it would fall to a manual process.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JON PAUL AUGIER:

You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Earlier, Council

Member Powers spoke about education and prevention,

and the Department has previously put out information that smoke alarms are the single most valuable life-saving device that New Yorkers can have in their homes. We have seen a number of civilian deaths in the last few months. What is the Department doing to ensure that New Yorkers have smoke alarms and that smoke alarms are operational?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: As you mentioned, we really want to emphasize the importance of people having working smoke alarm in their homes. That is really the difference, especially if you do have a fire and an early warning that could save your life. We do a lot of outreach. We give away a number of smoke alarms every year with our partners, with KITA (phonetic) and others. We help do installations via the Red Cross, and then we do a lot of education around ensuring that people are checking their batteries, that they're making sure consistently that the alarms are up and operational. I think as many of us know sometimes when you're cooking or something else is going on, your alarm goes off and you take it down so we're consistently doing education to make sure people remember to put that alarm back up and make sure that the battery is working in it. We have quite a bit of giveaways of

alarms that we do through fire safety education in communities every year.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: That is a much needed program that you have and welcomed within the communities. Would you just happen to know offhand what the percentage of homes in New York City who do not have any type of fire alarm within them had serious fires.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: We might not know the total number of homes, but I can defer to the Chief Fire Marshall on how many of our serious fires there was no working alarm present
(INAUDIBLE)

CHIEF FIRE MARSHALL DANIEL FLYNN: In 2021, we had 46 percent of the fires that we investigated had present and operational smoke detectors. As the Commissioner stated, there are other times when we find smoke detector is present but not operational. That's actually 14 percent of the time. To answer your question, Chair, the time when we have it present and operational is 46 percent of the time.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you. I will yield my time right now to Council Member Holden who has his hand up.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you so much for this, and thank you, Commissioner. I do have a few questions on the starting salaries from the EMT workers versus firefighters and paramedics. There's a starting salary of 39,386 dollars for an EMT worker. Has the Department ever looked pay parity, like what would it cost to have an EMT worker as the same starting salary as a firefighter? Have you looked at that at all because after 5 years, the average pay for a firefighter is over 85,000. For an EMT worker, it's less than 60, which seems to be a problem I would say. Try to make a living on 39,000 dollars in New York City. Have you worked on the numbers on this? What would we have to put in the budget extra to bring pay parity to the EMT workers?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I can say it's something we've looked at extensively. I was extensively involved in the last round of contract negotiations with the EMS union and, as you know, we were able to get them a significant raise in that round. I know that's just the beginning, and there's more to be done there, but that is something that I personally care very much about. It is a matter for collective bargaining so it's not something that the

Department has looked at in terms of our budget or that we could ask for in the budget. It is a matter that has to be negotiated as part of collective bargaining. We did that in the last contract negotiation. The fire department executives like myself were at the table because this issue mattered very much to us, and we plan to be in the next round of bargaining as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I do think it needs to be looked because it's in the best interest of the department to pay people a fair wage. Collective bargaining aside, we as Council Members, there's been a problem in the Council, people have recognized this, and we need to bring EMT workers up to a living salary, and right now that is not. Even after, like I mentioned, 5 years, there's quite a difference between firefighter, and we just learned the EMS workers, what it means during the pandemic to have the personnel on the job and what they provide for New Yorkers, lifesaving emergency service that is crucial, especially during the pandemic so we did learn a lesson, and I think we should address that in the upcoming budget.

Aside from that, on the self-closing doors, how often are inspections done on buildings,

on high-rise buildings, especially on residential buildings and who does them?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I can only speak for the fire department. Obviously, there are a number of agencies that inspect buildings in the City of New York. We have an algorithm that our field units use when they do their building inspection regularly during the week that determines which buildings they go inspect, and it's based on risk.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Could it be that a building hasn't been inspected in 5 years? You said that it may not be regular, it may be at risk, but is every high-rise building inspected or has to be?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I would have to go back and see what the average number of years are that go by. The algorithm is based on the risk of the building so those riskier buildings are inspected more frequently than those that are low risk, which might be something like new construction, but we can look at those averages and get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Have you worked out a formula that every building should be inspected and how much would that cost? Do you work with the

Department of Buildings? Do they inspect for that or is it just the Fire Department? We'd like to know that because that's an important feature to bring to the budget table. If we do see these catastrophic fires because a door didn't close, I mean that's an easy fix, and that's an easy fix by just sending an inspector to check it, or requiring, even if it's self-certification, like let's say the landlord has to prove that these have been installed and they're working through maybe an architect or someone else, but there's way to address it rather than just, if we don't have the personnel, then maybe we need to hire the personnel.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: Yep, absolutely...

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: How many inspectors do you have because I know that in November the plan included 15 new personnel as fire inspectors and that was I think specific to businesses, but are they also used for this type of inspecting. If they are not enough, to Council Member Holden's point, are there plans to hire more inspectors?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: We're actually significantly under head count in our inspector workforce right now, and that's due to the

pandemic. They experienced some significant losses during the pandemic. We actually lost some members unfortunately to COVID and some attrition so right now we're working to hire up to our head count and then were we to need additional inspectors obviously we'd flag that for the City Council and the Mayor's office and let them know that.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I will now yield my time to Council Member Feliz. He has his hand raised.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you so much, Chair Ariola. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Council Member Oswald Feliz. I want to start by thanking the FDNY for the work that they do in our city. I represent the 15th Council District in the Bronx, a district that was affected by the devastating Twin Parks fire, and that day we saw firefighters running towards danger, running toward a building filled with smoke to save the lives of innocent people, people that they had never, ever met, and for their work our entire city is extremely grateful and thankful and very lucky to have the FDNY on our side.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: I have a few questions that are aimed at helping develop future fire safety legislation. Earlier today, my Colleague, Council Member Keith Powers, touched on fire education. Going back to that topic, we briefly talked about fire education, and you said it was in our schools and also in our communities. Just to make sure that I have that information correct, the total budget for fire education is 1.5 million dollars. Is that correct?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH:

That's correct out of the Foundation. That funds materials and smoke alarms and some of our retirees. We do fire safety education through our active field units. It doesn't have a separate budget line, but all of our firefighters are dispatched regularly to go do fire safety education. It just doesn't have its own budget line.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Okay. Can you give us a comprehensive summary of our entire fire safety program? For example, do we do TV commercials as we do for COVID-related notices and purposes?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: We do. We have in-person events. We also have a number of online events and, because of COVID, we did

actually expand our online offerings. We have a website, fdnysmart.org, that people can go visit to get a lot of this content. You can see on there curriculum for teachers that might want to include it in the classroom, videos for parents. We try to do targeted audience for children, for seniors. We have services available in multiple languages, which is essential in New York City, and a number of fire safety educators are also bilingual. We do a number of PSAs, especially in the wake of some of these large and tragic fires such as the one in your district. We were able to work with the Mayor's office to really expand the public safety announcements throughout the City. We do quite a bit of comprehensive education but always looking to expand that and always looking to do more and definitely looking to work with local communities because it's really the local community that knows the best way to reach the most vulnerable population. We have worked with you a lot and very happy to keep working with you and the other Council Members here to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you.

Likewise. Second question, we've had a lot of fires in our city, especially this year, and many of them

have had different causes. Some of them like the one in my district due to the use of space heaters, others due to the fact that some people are bringing electric bikes to businesses and leaving batteries charging overnight, we actually had a similar fire in my district earlier this year. Just curious, what would you say are the top 5 causes of fires in our city, and I guess we could just talk about fires this year so far. What have been the 5 top causes?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I don't think we've yet compiled it for this winter, but typically the top causes as you mentioned are things like overloaded electrical outlets, cooking accidents, smoking, those are typically the top causes of fires. When this winter is over, we'll look to see if there are any particular trends, and we actually do release every year the top causes from the prior year so that we can help inform our education and target it where there might be emerging causes. As you mentioned, while things like cooking and electrical are common year to year as the causes of fire, we are looking closely at e-bikes which are an emerging concern for the fire department, especially the aftermarket batteries or multiple bikes being charged on a single outlet that isn't

really equipped for that much power so that's something we're monitoring really closely because we are seeing a spike in those and we'll definitely probably be coming back to the Council to let you know what we've found and what we might be able to do about it to prevent that from being an emerging cause of fires.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you. Final topic, moving on to self-closing door inspections. How often does the FDNY conduct self-closing door inspections, if at all?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I can't speak to the self-closing door aspect specifically. As I mentioned, we have a risk-based algorithm, and we inspect buildings based on the risk involved. I would say that there's always...

SERGEANT LEONARDO: Time expired.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: One challenge of any inspection is we can't go into individual homes or individual apartments, and so that always becomes a challenge when we're inspecting something like a self-closing door, whether or not someone is home, they make the difference in whether or not we're able to check an individual apartment door versus say a stairwell door which we would check

if we were in the building. We are working with HPD and other agencies and obviously yourself on some additional legislation and some additional ways to help work with landlords to actually check those.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: If I could just interject, Acting Commissioner, what is the Fire Department doing away from HPD, away from what the City Council could provide, what are you doing with your current budget to ramp up these inspections? They obviously need to be made. Most HPD buildings are noncompliant, and the ones that I've gone through through my district as well are noncompliant and do not become compliant until we as Council Members make the complaint so I just think that you need to look at your own budget. We will look at what we can do, but we need to increase the headcount and we need more inspections.

I'm sorry. Council Member Feliz, have you finished or you have another question.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: One final question. Let's say there is a self-closing door inspection and a violation is detected, what happens next? Does the FDNY notify HPD or does the FDNY take a different enforcement process?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I'm

not sure if the Chief of Department wants to answer that. If not, we could get sort of the workflow of how a violation is cured on behalf of the Fire Department and get that back to you.

CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT JOHN HODGENS: I'll

just say that when we do an inspection, we have different mechanisms to enforce the violations. The first choice is that we leave a notice with an occupant or a landlord of the violation, and we give them a specific amount of time in order to cure the violation, and we come back and reinspect. The other, if it falls into a more egregious category is we give, which is an NOV Fire Department summons, and that is also the occupant or the landlord has a period of time in order to cure that and if they could get that done within 30 days we will also dismiss that charge. That is really the main, for things like closing doors and basic fire prevention violations, we do just notify and we reinspect to make sure that it was done. If it wasn't done, then we have a criminal summons which is issued in response to that, but we do give them a chance to cure the violation.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Got it. Perfect.

I'd appreciate all that information. Thank you so much. No more questions on my part.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you, Council Member Feliz. I'd just like to note that Council Members Riley and Carr have joined the hearing.

I want to just touch on a couple of things. Council Member Holden mentioned about the lack of pay parity for the EMS workers. Does the FDNY support pay parity for EMS workers?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: The FDNY definitely supports making sure our EMS workers are appropriately compensated and as I mentioned that is something I have advocated for quite aggressively in the past and continue to do so in the future. It is not the Department's discretion unfortunately.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Has the Department also advocated that when EMS workers become firefighters that their time carries over with them instead of them losing all their city time and then going and starting in a different tier perhaps when they go over and become a firefighter?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH:
Again, that's something that's not our discretion but that I would advocate for as well.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, so we've talked a lot about fire safety and additional personnel at the fire companies and for community outreach. I'd like to switch gears now. We've talked about the mental health of our firefighters and their peer programs and what's being done. Is more money going to be put into programs like that so that firefighters who have had probably the most stressful year of all, EMS, EMT, and firefighters, have you created any type of resources that will be equally distributed for uniformed firefighters and EMS members to receive mental healthcare?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: Yeah, we do continue to increase the resources. We did add an additional counselor this year. Also, as you mentioned, EMS has a differing set of benefits from the firefighters due to their separate contracts and so we've added a couple of programs including covering the cost of copays for our EMS members in order to find other ways to help EMS. EMTs and paramedics obviously have been through just a tremendously difficult couple of years with COVID, and so we've tried to find a number of ways to help ensure they can access the same level of care as our firefighters, and it's something that actually the

union is a great advocate and we meet with them regularly and continue to hear from them about additional resources that we can put into CSU specifically for EMS, including some additional EMS officers and peer counselors.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health conducted 2 studies that concluded that firefighters face a 9 percent increase in cancer diagnoses and a 14 percent increase in cancer-related deaths compared to the general population. What is the Department doing to decrease those figures with firefighters?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: That is definitely accurate. Cancer is unfortunately a very serious risk and a much higher risk for our firefighters. We are increasing the cleaning of our bunker gear. We've started a number of campaigns. One is called Clean is the New Salty to encourage our members to regularly decontaminate their bunker gear, and I know something that we've talked about is working with the Council to fund additional washing locations for that bunker gear, which is definitely something that we're interested in.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, that's great. Let's then switch gears to our fleet service and

vehicle maintenance. As a service-oriented agency, the Department relies on its fleet and vehicles to respond to emergencies. The maintenance of these vehicles is of paramount importance. With rising prices, supply chain issues, and the aging fleet, the Department has increased its fleet service budget by 34 percent since the budget was adopted to keep up with these changes. The Department has had to rent ambulances in fiscal 2022 to meet operational demands. What strategies are being taken to ensure that fiscal 2023 and outyear fleet services budget is appropriately funded?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: As you mentioned, the supply chain issues that are affecting so much of the country have been very impactful in fleet. We have found some creative ways to make it through this period through rentals, but it continues to be a challenge that we're on top of. I'll hand it over to Commissioner Christoff if she wants to add anything about the additional funding that we've put into fleet to address these issues.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LIZETTE

CHRISTOFF: As you noticed, we did get an increase in our budget for fleet maintenance. A lot of that is actually in line with what our spending in fleet has

been sort of historically with the exception of the ambulance rentals so that was a temporary bump in our fleet services budget. We're in the process of assessing what we think our need will be going forward, and so we're in conversation with OMB about what we anticipate spending given the age of our fleet, the anticipated deliveries, and sort of where everything stands.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: This is going to get to like capital projects and/or staffing and new classes. The Fire Department has a preliminary capital commitment plan from 2022 to 2026 that totals 1.34 billion dollars. The single largest project in the plan is a new training center for the FDNY on Randall's Island where the fire academy is located with 224 million in funding in those years. Can you please provide more information on this project, what changes will occur, larger class capacity, technological upgrades, and is the Department constructing any new firehouses and EMS station and, if so, where and how were these locations determined?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: When it comes to the academy, the answer to your list of does it include those things is yes to all of those. I know that you've been out there and I know you're

going to come visit us again. We have a footprint with some very buildings that are really aging and really could be better utilized. We need much more additional classroom space. We need a lot of technical training facilities. We have the subway simulator and some other things, but we need more technical facilities at our disposal because as the city grows more complex so does our operational response and thus so does the training that we have to provide to our members to ensure that they're safe when they operate. All of that is going to be part of this redo of the academy, and I'll actually be happy to bring you guys out there sometime and walk you through and give you some sense of what we think it could look like, the new technology, the new building, and some of the new facilities that we'll be looking to build over the next few years.

On the new firehouses and EMS stations, I'll hand it over to Commissioner Christoff to go through what we currently have planned.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER LIZETT CHRISTOFF: Thanks. Usually new facilities tend to be replacements of existing facilities, usually get handled in the budget process as those needs arise. Any of the brand

new facilities that we plan on building are reflected in the budget. The most significant additional funding add tied to new facilities a few plans ago was for EMS7. There was about 70 million dollars added for a new facility for that EMS station. We also have ongoing work for various fire stations that are in the process of being renovated.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Do you know where those are? Do you have the location?

COMMISSIONER LIZETTE CHRISTOFF: There's a large project at Engine 224 in Brooklyn Heights which is expected to be completed in the fall. There is a project for EMS Station 17 which is currently in design so construction is anticipated to be bid out in the fall. There is a project for Engine 268 in the Rockaways which is expected to go out to bid later this year. We also have a significant project coming up for Engine 287 to reconstruct that facility after the existing facility was damaged to some adjacent construction.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Great.
Congratulations, by the way, on yesterday's graduation of the probationary firefighters.

COMMISSIONER LIZETTE CHRISTOFF: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: In that vein, I just wondered what is the current status of the firefighter hiring class, like I know this one graduated but when will there be the next class? When will the next exam be offered?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: The next class will be going in on March 28th, quite soon, because as you know we are under headcount and we're looking to catch up. We're not quite sure at this time when the next exam will be given because we do need to extend this list because it was not utilized during the pandemic so we can get back to you once we have a date for the new exam but it will be a couple years out. We still have a significant portion of this exam, of members on the list of this exam that we need to work through.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, and what is the Department's goal for a headcount? What do you see as the goal?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: We'd like to be at headcount, which is not something that we have been at for some time. There's a very brief moment right before the pandemic that we actually reached headcount, and then we went back under during

the pandemic so we're very eager to reach firefighter headcount.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, great. I just want to mention that Council Member Yeger has joined the call.

Also, as long as we're talking about firefighters, I'd like to talk about the EMS and that the Department offers an exam that gives members opportunity to become a firefighter. As this is moving members from one area of the department to another, this will clearly have a big swing on staffing levels. As the department is currently overstaffed at EMT and understaffed in uniformed levels, is this transition happening soon, and how will the department backfill EMS positions and ensure services are not negatively impacted?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: The promotional exam as it's called from EMS to fire is given around the same time, actually right before the open competitive exam so one was given fairly recently and that list has for the most been exhausted so another one won't be given for some time. Right now, you won't be seeing a number of people from EMS to fire. There were significant impacts as you mentioned when we move a number of

people from EMS into fire all in once in these classes of 300 so we are looking towards the future to see if there's a different way to do this that does not have so much impact on EMS when that exam is given, and we have a number of years to plan for that so we're starting our planning now.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, great. I want to make mention that Council Member Brewer has joined us.

Josh, if you want to check with the Council Members if there are questions they'd like to ask.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Sure. Council Members, please use the Zoom raise hand function if you want to ask any questions of this panel. I see Council Member Holden's hand is raised. Go ahead, sir.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Chair. Back to the EMS workers, Commissioner, from 2018 to 2020 the number of assaults on EMS members increased from 125 to 323 with a 5-year average from 2016 through 2020, the average was 178 so what does the Department currently do and offer to EMS members to protect them during

emergencies. For instance, are there training sessions offered?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I should say that we take this incredibly seriously. Any assault on one of our members is absolutely unacceptable, and I will hand it over to Chief Bonsignore to talk a little bit more about some of the additional measures we've taken to address that.

CHIEF OF EMS LILLIAN BONSIGNORE: Good afternoon, everyone. This, as the Commissioner said, is an incredibly difficult situation for EMS. Times are tough, and we are seeing an increase in assaults, and we are trying to do what we can to make sure that people are adequately trained to keep themselves safe. One of the things that we've been able to do recently is start to give all of EMS de-escalation and self-defense training so we're in the process of doing that now. We expect that the entire EMS will be trained de-escalation and self-defense by the end of this year.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: What about 2021? We didn't get the numbers for 2021. Has it still continued to rise in the assaults on EMS workers?

CHIEF LIZETTE CHRISTOFF: We've continued to see EMS workers be assaulted, and we continue to

also lobby for those people who injure or assault EMS people to be prosecuted according to whatever laws exist that prevent. When we have assaults on EMS people, there is a felony assault with up to 7 years imprisonment, and we encourage everybody to get behind making sure that people are held accountable.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: In the way of protection, other than self-defense, are there any considerations for giving the unit mace or some other ways to protect themselves during an assault?

CHIEF LIZETTE CHRISTOFF: No, we haven't considered mace. EMS are people who give medical help so we're not in the business of hurting anyone. What we do is we talk very much about making sure everybody understands that retreating away from danger is the way to go, teach them how to protect themselves should they get into an environment where they can't escape right up front. We've also been able to find funding recently to get a replacement ballistic vest to everybody in EMS. Everybody in EMS has a ballistic vest. Some of these vests have been not replaced and it was due to funding. We were able to find funding for that so we're in the process now of getting everybody a renewed ballistic vest that is

over the age of 6 years old so that is a step in the right direction.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: We'll now turn to Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I'm on a cell phone. I apologize. Thank you very much. I have 2 quick questions. One is, and I know that Commissioner Kavanagh knows this, but the issue of inspections. My understanding from Council Members in the past is that there are persons who should've been hired to do inspections but they haven't been hired yet, and maybe this has been discussed. I'm sorry, but I have so many daycare centers, new buildings, where it takes, I don't know, 5 months, 4 months to get an inspection. That's not helpful for the childcare center or for the City coming back.

Number 2, if you could just update me, I didn't see it in the excellent material prepared by Staff, but I might've missed it. What is the status of technology in terms of Grumman no longer exists because it was a lousy contract, but what exact technology is FDNY using that is satisfactory for the most important, knowing what the building scape looks

like, etc.? Is that something that's a budget issue?

Is it solved, etc.? I've just been through that for so many years. Those 2 questions. The inspection is a huge problem. Thank you very much.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: I cannot agree more that long wait times are unacceptable for businesses and especially essential businesses like childcare and the restaurants and all the small businesses that we need for the city to come back from COVID. We have actually brought in a number of additional resources. We've actually put together a 10-point plan, and we are working with Mayor Adams' administration and the Department of Buildings to immediately begin tackling our backlog of inspections that built up under COVID. That includes things like hiring up a number of additional staff members but also utilizing cross agency resources with the Department of Buildings and other agencies to ensure that we can tackle those things now and including new technology. We got a new software system in the Bureau of Fire Prevention, and that is going to be a huge boon for being able to find efficiencies and especially for businesses to be able to get sort of a one-stop shop for whatever inspections they need from the City so that it's not

as much of a frustrating experience for them. That's something that's a number 1 priority of ours we're tackling head-on to make sure that those wait times go down drastically within the next few months.

On technology, we have done a number of things on technology. I think one of the most interesting that addresses what you're referring to in terms of situational awareness for our first responders, they have devices in their hands now that have an application on it that actually allows them to see as they're arriving to an incident additional information about that building. The great thing about this application is it can grow as the City grows and as more information becomes available so as more things are put online about certain buildings, we can add those into that application and actually have our first responders know as much as possible about a building or a site before they arrive there and before they enter that building most importantly.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Does that system have a name? Obviously we know what it was before, but what is it actually called, the current system?

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: The application I'm referring to is the Incident Command application, and we can put that on any common smart

device. It's not necessarily proprietary just to the fire department. The application is, but it can be put on any device. It doesn't need a special piece of equipment. As you referred to, in the past we often had a specialized piece of equipment. We don't need that anymore. We can use just like say an iPhone and put this application on it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank you.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: Uh-hm.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Thank you, Council Member Brewer. If any other Council Members have questions, please use the Zoom raise hand function. If not, we will move on to the next panel which will be the New York City Emergency Management.

Seeing no other questions from Members, I'm going to pass it back to the Chair, and we can then move onto NYCEM. Go ahead, Chair Ariola.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you, Josh. I want to thank everyone for coming. I want to thank everyone for your insightful questions and the important questions.

I think that, Commissioner, you see a common thread here in safety and education and

staffing and making sure that our firefighters are kept healthy both mentally and physically with putting more stations where they can clean their bunker gear more quickly and more frequently so that they're not breathing in the carcinogens.

I think you realize that our EMT workers need parity in their pay and when they do become firefighters that they need to be able to bring that time that they accrued when they were EMS workers with them to the fire department just like we do in any city agency.

I think you understand that we do back the FDNY. We want to see your fleet and your maintenances and everything to be kept up to snuff. We need to have fire department out there.

We need the fifth firefighter. We need to be creative, my fellow Colleagues, in getting that fifth firefighter back at the different engine companies.

We need to work on structural fires. Council Member Feliz and the Twin Parks Task Force that I'm involved in with him, we're going to work so hard to make sure that the deaths that took place in his district never happen again. I look forward to

that, Council Member Feliz, and I'm honored to be on your Committee.

We need to work together. We need to make sure that the fire department is getting what they need but more importantly, to speak to what Council Member Brewer said, we need to make sure that when funding is appropriated that it is spent and people are hired and people are put out to do what they need to do and it's not just sitting in a pot somewhere or people waiting to be called from a list. We need more firefighters. I'm so happy for the group yesterday that graduated, and I wish them nothing but good luck and health and that they should remain safe. We want to see more probationary firefighters come. We want to see more EMTs coming. I know that you said that there's no plan for EMTs to advance to the FDNY. We want to incentivize our people who work for the City of New York, especially as first responders to crossover, to become firefighters from EMTs or vice versa.

For those and so many other reasons, I think this was a very productive first hearing. I look forward, as I said in my opening statement, to more productive hearings and really identifying what was not done in our last session and bringing to

light things that need to be done in this section.

For that, I'm honored to serve here with you. I'm honored to be your Chair.

Now, we're going to move on to Emergency Management. Thank you so much for coming on.

ACTING COMMISSIONER LAURA CAVANAGH: Thank you.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Thank you so much, Chair. Next panel to testify will be representatives from New York City Emergency Management. I see we've got some of the folks there. Following Emergency Management, we'll have an opportunity for the public to testify so thank you for bearing with us as we go through Emergency Management.

Commissioner, I see all 3 people there. Great. For New York City Emergency Management, we will have testimony from Commissioner Zach Iscol; Christina Farrell who is the First Deputy Commissioner; and Stacy Rosenfeld who's the Chief Financial Officer.

Before we begin, I will administer the oath. I will call on each of you individually to affirm. Please raise your right and affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

before this Committee and to answer honestly to Council Member questions.

Commissioner, go ahead.

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: I do.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: First Deputy Commissioner.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINA FARRELL: I do.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Miss Rosenfeld.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER STACY ROSENFELD: I do.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Thank you so much. Go ahead.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you so much, Josh, for the very smooth transition. I certainly appreciate it.

Commissioner Iscol, I want to thank you for coming and congratulate you on your appointment. I look forward to working together with you. I appreciate you coming out to the district and meeting with me with Deputy Commissioner Farrell and really letting me know that you want to be hands-on in the community for the 5 boroughs. I've seen that you've met with all the local stakeholders, I really do appreciate that, including FEMA Region 2, NYCHA which

is very important, New York City Water, the fire department, and the Mayor's Community Assistance Unit which is a place where I used to work so that's important to me.

With the knowledge from these conversations and being new on the job, and we get that, a lot of us are new as Council Members for a few weeks, what have you learned through these conversations and what are your plans for the New York City Emergency Management agency as the Commissioner?

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Apologies, Chair. I'm sorry to interrupt here, but, Commissioner, I'll just give you the opportunity to make your prepared testimony.

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Chair, let me just say any chance I have to come out to Lenny's Clam Bar you got me. I'm always in.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You got it.

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Good afternoon, Chairperson Ariola and Members of the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management. I'm Zach Iscol, the Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management. I'm joined today by my First Deputy Commissioner

Christina Farrell and our Chief Financial Officer Stacy Rosenfeld.

Before I get started with my testimony, I do want to just take a moment and acknowledge the passing of Chris Esposito. She was the wife of Former Commissioner Joe Esposito, one of my predecessors here in this office who left enormous shoes to fill. Chris was a member of the NYCEM family for many years. She was really beloved by all. When we got notice of her passing, you could feel it and hear it in this building, and her passing leaves a hole that will be impossible to fill. Our entire teams mourns her loss, and we're sending Commissioner Esposito and his family our love, our prayers to him and his family during this difficult time.

I have now been Commissioner for not quite 3 weeks and while this may be our first meeting for some of us and perhaps even your first introduction to our agency, no doubt you're aware of this agency and the great work we do to ensure New Yorkers are prepared for emergencies and to assist in recovering after their most difficult moments.

New York City Emergency Management is responsible for preparing and educating people prior to emergencies and coordinating city-wide emergency

planning and response for all types and scales of emergencies while completing mitigation projects that range from temporary flood protection measures to building stronger communities. From water main breaks to fires to coastal storms, global pandemics, we're the ones coordinating resources so agencies can fulfill their core missions during emergencies. Needless to say, it has been a very busy year. New York City Emergency Management has been fully activated for COVID-19 for more than 2 calendar years. That's the longest activation in our agency's history.

Our Emergency Managers have literally been working around the clock, often for concurrent emergencies, fires, extreme heat and winter weather emergencies, the devastating flash flood emergency caused by Hurricane Ida.

In the fiscal calendar year to date, we have responded to or monitored more than 2,500 incidents including building collapses, infrastructure incidents, and water main breaks. January 2022 was one of our busiest months ever with 6 activations including the tragic fire in the Bronx, a gas explosion, and multiple snow events. I know I speak for everybody in this building when I say the

team was very lucky at that time to have First Deputy Christina Farrell at the helm as the Acting Commissioner at that time.

As always, throughout all emergencies, we continue our Blue Sky programs and responsibilities, and this past fiscal year have held over 300 Ready New York Preparedness events, released 16 podcasts and 60 press releases, held over 80 briefings with the private sector, and provided over 900 notifications to elected officials.

Emergency Management continues to assist with large-scale program management such as the Vaccine Command Center and the Mayor's Extreme Weather Task Force. Our most public-facing program, Notify NYC, I'm very proud to announce we just passed 1 million subscribers. It's available in 13 languages including American Sign Language through video format. This program has issued over 1,500 Notify NYC messages to subscribers in the current fiscal year to date and more than 22,000 notifications since its inception.

Emergency Management also has identified COVID-19 pandemic recovery priorities, our Risk Reduction and Recovery Division led a multi-partner framework process to guide COVID-19 recovery to be

equitable and also visionary. The team tracked how the City was recovering along healthcare, housing, social community, economic, transportation infrastructure sectors, and to date has created and distributed over 61 recovery dashboards to decisionmakers.

We continue to strive to make this agency reflective of the city that we serve. Continuing our commitment to best prepare our non-English speaking residents, New York City Emergency Management conducted a multilingual biennial emergency preparedness service. We attended over 200 district service and borough service cabinet meetings and trained 33 new Community Emergency Response Team, CERT, members who are now volunteering their time in their communities with a new basic training session that will begin this spring.

We hosted mobile office hours in each borough in partnership with elected officials. In an effort to further expand our presence in your communities, we are embarking on a long-term project to have borough command centers strategically located throughout the city.

We continue to look ahead to find new ways to prepare the City and our residents for the next emergency.

With that, let me now provide a brief snapshot of our budget for the next fiscal year. Our projected total fiscal year 2023 City Tax Levy Expense budget is 37.5 million. We rely on our CTL Expense budget to support the majority of the agency's administrative, technological, and operational costs. The projected fiscal year 2023 City Tax Level Personnel Service budget is 11.2 million which supports the 82 personnel lines paid directly through our Tax Levy funds. This includes 1.6 million in funding for 18 staff members dedicated to working increasing communication and services to people with disabilities, access, and functional needs. Our other staffing is supported through grant funds and personnel on assignment from multiple agencies.

With the January financial plan, the Adams' administration directed city agencies to meet a 3 percent spending reduction target along with a vacancy reduction. Our agency worked to meet this target in a way that allowed us to have the least impact possible on our operations. We continue to

discuss and formulate administration priorities with City Hall and OMB as part of the budget process.

Our projected fiscal year 2023 other than personnel service budget is 26.3 million which covers all agency operating and administrative costs. This budget includes a significant portion of nondiscretionary funding. These funds are designated to cover our warehouse lease, utilities, and telecommunications costs including the maintenance and operations of our Emergency Operation Center and backup facilities. This money also supports our fleet and all additional equipment, supplies, and materials needed to run the agency.

The agency receives grant funding to support many of our core programs. In the past year, we secured 31.5 million in federal funding primarily through the Urban Area Security Initiative Grant. This funding is vital to our ability to run many of our initiatives including the Ready New York Public Education program, Community Emergency Response Team program, Continuity of Operations program, Geographic Information Systems, training and exercises, watch command and response, and city-wide incident management system planning, and the emergency supply stockpile.

We work with City Hall on the City's congressional delegation and our partner agencies to push for full Homeland Security funding in future years. This money supports critical operations within ours and several other agencies' budgets and is critical to the City.

As I wrap up my first month as Commissioner, I would like to express my admiration for our incredibly hard-working and dedicated emergency managers. The last 2 years have been exceptionally difficult on our municipal workforce, and our emergency managers were not immune to hardships in their own lives while never wavering in their support for the people of New York. I am proud to be their advocate and to represent them as we being a new chapter in recovering from the pandemic and responding to whatever challenges come our way.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working with the Council, and I am happy to take your questions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Commissioner Iscol, you like your job. I see that, I hear that, and I know that you're very enthusiastic and you're more than equipped what needs to be done and we're

appreciative of that and with Christina Farrell at your side, you're an unbeatable duo. That's for sure.

What obstacles do you anticipate to have to overcome? It's been 2 months but you've seen some obstacles.

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: It's not even been a month. Look, there's no shortage of challenges, and I think like in combat, like in war, you're always fighting the last war, and I think here at the agency we are very focused on learning from COVID, from the pandemic, from prior events involving extreme weather, from some of the events that Christina led the agency through in January including the tragic Bronx fire, and so we're always learning. I think some of the big challenges are just our job is to be prepared for things that you sometimes can't be prepared for, for the unknown, for black swan events. I think we have an incredibly nimble agency that will adapt to those circumstances, but that is the biggest challenge, is just the unknown.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: What are some of the goals that you have for NYCEM? What do you see as some of the goals that you'd like to have your name attached to?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Thank you for the question. There's no end. For me right now, my biggest focus over the first 90 days is really getting to know all the members of the team here, really hearing their ideas and empowering them, but at the same time I think there are a lot of things that we can do, specifically with diversity within the ranks of the organization to make sure that NYCEM is more representative of the communities that we support. One of the things that we're working on is uncalled contracts, specifically to better work with minority and women-owned business enterprises around the city and small businesses. Oftentimes when there is an emergency, we have to go to the nearest company that can support us, but we want to have contracts in place that we can work with M/WBEs and small businesses ahead of time.

There's also making sure that we have a great working relationship with key leaders around the city, including many of the Members of the new City Council.

I think one of the other challenges that we face is oftentimes people are not really familiar with the work that we do and the breadth of our

capabilities, and I think it's really important that we do that.

Hurricane season, storm season is right around the corner. Heat season is right around the corner. I want to make sure that we are prepared for that.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: That's great. We all know that Emergency Management is a relatively small agency, but the people who work for your agency are highly specialized and that's very important. In order to operate at a high level, you have to maintain these vital, valuable, experienced employees. What is the agency's annual attrition rate?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: I don't know the number off the top of my head, and I can get you that number. I know we have seen significant attrition over the last 2, 3 years because of the pandemic and the workload. I think it's important to note at any one time, so we have an emergency operation center that is activated in times of emergencies, and that EOC has been activated over the last 2 years because of COVID in addition to responding to every other emergency that the city has faced, and I think there's been about 15 other activations over the last

133 days. What that means is a third of our workforce here at any given time, all of our employees are a member of Team Red, White, or Blue, and they are on call for 3-week periods so a third of our agency, whether you are a lawyer, whether you work in administration, no matter what your job is here, you also wear another hat in the EOC responding to emergencies so at any given time, because we have been activated, a third of our workforce has been focused on emergencies and not necessarily the day to day of what they would be doing here, whether it's planning, resilience training, etc. There is a big impact on the agency. I will say this is also a very attractive place to work, and when we do lose people it's not that necessarily hard to fulfill their roles.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: What is Emergency Management doing to incentive people to remain and not leave and could we be doing more?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: I appreciate the question. I think one of the most important things for me is leadership and management of people. That's my primary job here. As you pointed out, Chairperson Ariola, the people that work here are remarkable. They really are, and they are very, very good at

their jobs, and it is my job to create the environment and the ecosystem for them to do their best work. That's what I've done throughout my career in business, in the Marine Corps, in non-profits, responding to natural disasters. There's no shortage of ways. I think people always reflectively go to paying people more. It never hurts. At the same time, this building is filled with people who are dedicated public servants and they really are inspired and moved by being able to get out there into their communities and do more work. There's a lot of other things that you can do in terms of leadership development, showing career pathways for people so that they can get promoted, giving people ownership of problems and sort of new opportunities, and making sure that they are vested partners in the work that you're doing.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Right. I couldn't agree more. You had mentioned earlier about coastal storms, and we are heading into hurricane season, over the past decade we have had some serious hurricanes and coastal storms impact the City and in particular our coastal and low-lying communities, we're still recovering. I happen to live in one of those communities that is still recovering from

Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, which were in 2011 and 2012. As we saw Hurricane Ida last summer, storms are bringing great deals of water quickly and we need to make sure all communities are informed about upcoming emergencies, and that was in inland areas so that was surprising that it was so devastating, and it was devastating and lives were lost. What is Emergency Management doing to increase communication in coastal and low-lying area communities?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Great question. Thank you. That was one of the biggest lessons from Ida in particular, and you can never do enough to prepare. I think you have to activate early and those investments, also sometimes people are worried, decisionmakers are worried about the cost of activating early. They always end up saving you money and often, even more importantly, lives in the long run.

First off, you can always do more to prepare. We are always looking for ways through Ready New York, through our CERT program to communicate with more folks. We are always looking to increase the number of subscribers to Notify NYC. I would say the City Council is a critically important partner in that. We need you to be involved in getting your

constituents to sign up for Notify NYC, which is a major way of getting people to sign up. We're also always looking for opportunities to speak to your constituents. Please invite us out to your town halls, to meetings that your having to get in front of them. Also, there's also things that we can do like canvassing and other ways of getting out into neighborhoods directly. We're doing that through community groups.

Christina, is there anything that you would add to that?

FIRST DEPUTY CHRISTINA FARRELL: No. I think it's an ongoing issue. I will say that over the years like back with Hurricane Irene and Hurricane Sandy, people did not believe that they were going to be hit by hurricanes. Even though we were coastal, they didn't think we were Miami so I think that we have seen improvement that after all the emergencies we've been through people understand that it will happen here so that is a good change. As the Commissioner said, the going out, we have a tremendous language at Notify NYC. We have 13 different Twitter sites in commonly spoken languages. People can get the direct messages. We would like all New Yorkers signed up, but we really are focused on

the non-English speakers. When we were out in your district, we were talking about how your district has changed and all the languages spoken there so that's really a goal of ours for every year but specifically for 2022 to work to get people to get the materials, get notified, and also if Twitter, if texts or email isn't the right venue, we want to know what other apps or what other ways people are consuming information so we can meet them at that point and try to avoid some of the tragedies that you spoke about.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I do want to congratulate on meeting the 1 million followers on Twitter. That's very, very impressive, and it speaks to the amount of information that you do pump out and the amounts of good information and a lot of times in areas where floods have been hit and maybe they don't have home lines and they don't have TVs and such, they still do have their phone and they can get good direction from a Tweet or something on Instagram so I really do commend you on that.

You also referred to the emergency stockpile, and that was a big thing during Sandy, was getting provisions out and into the communities once it hit. Previously, the Department was involved in the upkeep and contents of the emergency stockpile,

and the contents were designed to support life, safety, and hygiene for 70,000 people for 7 days. What is Emergency Management's involvement with the emergency stockpile now and how does Emergency Management rotate those items in the stockpile for expiration dates and is the stockpile rotation federally funded?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Thank you. Yes, there are elements of the stockpile that are federally funded and some that are city funded.

We have a remarkable team that runs our logistics and manages our warehouse operations. Chair Ariola, when we got together last week one of the recommendations you had was inviting City Council Members to come out and tour our headquarters. I would encourage you to also come out and visit and tour the warehouse. I think, Chair Ariola, what you had recommended is we try and get every City Council Member out here, specifically because so many of them are new to the Council and it's a great operation to see that operation. They are constantly looking at expiration dates, we're going through that process right now with COVID test kits for example, to make sure the things that we have are not expired and are up to date.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay, you spoke about community outreach and being a former civic leader, I would have, it was with OEM at the time, come out and speak at the civic association meetings. I think that strengthening communities was an initiative that New York City Emergency Management kicked off in November 2021, and it included plans to partner with up to 70 community-based organizations each year to increase Emergency Management's community involvement. By collaborating with CBOs, they would be able to better reach communities and send funding for emergency plans, access community emergency networks, assist with communications, gather information, and help with feeding operations and more. The program has a remaining budget of 750,000 dollars in fiscal 2022 and 4.15 million dollars in fiscal 2023. Since the program began this year, can you discuss some of the work that Emergency Management has accomplished in this fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Christina, do you want to dive into that.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINA FARRELL: We have an amazing community engagement team here, and as we worked through COVID and worked with different agencies and communities, just like all

aspects of the City, we saw that we really needed to focus even more on the community level and strengthening the emergency capabilities. With a very quick turnaround, we were able to engage 9 networks across the city and give them some seed money and start working with them. As you referenced, we have some additional money. Now, we have an RFT that we put out and we're seeking additional networks. Then, as there's a big influx of money coming in in November, we have some staff lines that we're hiring people to manage this and then the goal is with the Council and with our existing partnerships with our CERT members to have these community groups really across the City. It's a bottom-up approach, grassroots working, so if there is a coastal storm event, if there's severe heat, different things, they can activate. They will have a straight line into our emergency operation center and really help to push information both ways because we need to get information out, culturally appropriately to the communities, but we also need to get information back on what's the best place to have a service center or what are some specific needs in the community so we're really excited about this program. We're happy that it's been funded, and we're working very quickly

to get it up as much as possible so many more good things to come with the Strengthening Communities initiative for sure.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You mentioned 9 networks operating now. Do you know where they are?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINA FARRELL: They're in all 5 boroughs. Some where networks that we already knew, and some were new to us. I can get you the complete list, but I know that they are representative of the 5 boroughs.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You mentioned that you do have money earmarked for staffing. How many staff members would you be hiring to do this project?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINA FARRELL: Ultimately, we want to have 1 staff member per borough focused and then an overall program manager, but, coming in, I think we're going to hire 3 people to start, get them up to speed, get the networks, because the great thing about this program once we get the networks up and running, we're able to give maintenance money because they need money to be supported so we're just tiering it up, but ultimately we would like to have 6 people, a program manager and 1 person for each borough.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: With the increased funding, do we get to do additional things? Can you name just a couple of things that you'd like to accomplish that you're not doing now with the existing funding?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINA

FARRELL: Yeah, so as the community groups get up and the networks get strong, we want to do additional training, we'd like to do exercises so it's really a microcosm of the work that we do as a emergency managers. We'd like to look at other initiatives across the City because obviously the definition of emergency is broad and maybe bring in other groups, like bring in a youth component or bring in some community piece that may take a little more time and like any of these good initiatives, just like our longstanding CERT teams, no 2 networks are going to look the same so a network on the South Shore of Staten Island and a network in Hunts Point, they're both going to be our networks and they're going to have certain pieces, but they're going to look very different, and that's really the strength of this program, if you will, that it's not a cookie-cutter approach. It's not us saying this is what your network should look like. It's us working to identify

what's strong in those communities already and what they can bring to the table.

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: I would just add to that. Christina said it all, but there's certain principles that we can train those networks in in terms of emergency management and participation and readiness, but there's also then a bottom-up sort of approach that then takes place that sort of informs how that looks differently around the city based on the needs of specific communities and the things that those communities care about addressing or what they might consider an emergency.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Right. I appreciate it. People with disabilities are very important, especially if we don't have electricity and they were on life-saving oxygen and such. The New York City Emergency Management section of the preliminary Mayor's Management Report begins with an emphasis that Emergency Management is focusing on equity through programs and activities to address needs of the City's diverse communities. What steps is Emergency Management taking in this area?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: A lot. Number 1, when you look at Notify NYC messages, making sure that we include things like American Sign Language.

Our evacuation plans, making sure that we have shelters that are specifically set up for folks with functional needs. We're currently working on creating specific networks around the City to make sure our elderly population, people with disabilities, people with functional needs are able to get the information they need in a time of an emergency, whether it's a fire, a hazmat incident, you name it. We're trying to involve the private sector in some of those conversations because they can be very effective if you're a building owner in alerting people that live in your building as opposed to trying to do an on the ground canvassing. I think across the spectrum of the life cycle, whether it's preparedness, mitigation, response, or recover, making sure that we are working for that community is critically important. I'd add making sure that some of the folks that we're hiring are representative of those communities.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: That's very important. How much funding is dedicated towards this program?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Stacy, do you have the specific number?

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: While Stacy's

looking for that, Stacy, how are you going to utilize it for outreach?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER STACY ROSENFELD:

Am I unmuted?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Yep, you're unmuted.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER STACY ROSENFELD:

I apologize. It's about 1.2 million. It was 1.3 million in the fiscal year '21 budget so I think it's slightly less. I know we have money dedicated for Ready New York, and I know part of it funds staffing. Maybe Christina could touch a bit more on the outreach.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CHRISTINA

FARRELL: We have several staff lines as Stacy said that are (INAUDIBLE) funds, and what we've done is we've incorporated them into different units so like within communications, within community outreach, within logistics instead of making a standalone unit within our Notify NYC because we really wanted it to be holistic throughout the agency. We've been doing that really since Hurricane Sandy. There's always more to do for sure, but it's brought some really remarkable changes and accomplishments that we're

very proud of. We have a senior outreach coordinator, and he's 80 years old himself but has way more energy than I have, and he goes out. He does it in-person, he does it remotely, whatever it takes, and he works with senior centers, he works with different advocacy group, along with our youth outreach coordinator, with schools in District 20 and 75 are students that have special needs and so we try to do it both ways, looking overall at our programs, like the Commissioner said how to make sure that the shelters are accessible and have the equipment and things they need. We also are very involved in American Sign Language, and any time we send a travel advisory or some kind of emergency notification, we also send it to our advanced warning system. That goes out to all the service providers in the city so starting with like Catholic Charities, Visiting Nurse, the United Federation, those, all the way down to individual care providers and so if consumers can't get the information themselves they can get it through their caregiver as well.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I just have one more question. We've been talking a lot about the 3 percent that was cut by the City and other cuts that all the agencies are realizing. Given that Emergency

Management relies on city funding to support the majority of the agency's administrative, technological, and operational costs, what impact will these savings or cuts, depending on which end of the cut you're on, what impact will these savings have on any of Emergency Management's operations in the next fiscal year?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Thank you for the question. Bottom line, none. Stacy, Christina, the team here really did a remarkable job identifying savings within that 3 percent peg that would not impact our ability to serve New Yorkers. They found things that were things that cost less money, for example, with the interim flood protection measures, we're not doing less but there are certain things that we found cost savings on or things that were less expensive than we had initially projected. There was other sort of efficiencies that were found. There were some funds that could be displaced to other agencies so they did a very good job of meeting the 3 percent peg without an impact on our operations. I'd say the other sort of great thing about this agency is we are primarily funded through grants so even if you look at our CTL payroll funding, the vast majority of the people that work here are on grant

funding and a lot of our additional funding comes from grants and not the City Tax Levy so it was minimized.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. Like you say, you get grants and federal funding, right? Do the reductions in city funding make it more difficult for Emergency Management to comply with the local laws that provide those fundings or no?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: No, not to my knowledge. Stacy, Christina?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER STACY ROSENFELD: No, there's no impact at all.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: My final question actually is in fiscal 2023, the preliminary budget included 780,000 dollars and in fiscal 2022 only for contracts related to the Riker's food trucks. Can you please provide more detail on this funding including if it is city-funded and if the true spending amount will be 780,000 dollars?

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Stacy, Christina. I'm not familiar with the Riker's food trucks.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER STACY ROSENFELD: I can take that one. Post Ida, there was an enormous initiative to make sure there was food accessible

throughout the city and part of that was accomplished through putting food trucks in impacted areas. There was also a request for us to have some food trucks out at Riker's Island to support the staffing there. It was a very short-term operation until Corrections actually picked it up. We sometimes are used for contracts. They're very short. Sometimes we have a contract in place or we have the ability to do something, kind of a one-time stop gap measure so that's what that was. It was short-term one time funding because we already had a vendor operating until Corrections could pick it up, and I do believe that was the actual amount.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you very much.
Josh.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Thank you, everyone. Any Council Members have questions, please use the Zoom raise hand function. I see that we're joined by Council Member Gennaro as well, but if that's it, I think we can move on to the public testimony now.

COMMISSIONER ZACH ISCOL: Thank you all so much. It's great to be with you today. Chair, I really thank you for your questions.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: Excellent. Thanks, everyone. Now we'll be moving on to the public testimony section of today's hearing. To start, we have Oren Barzilay from the EMS Union Local 2507. After Oren, I believe Michael Greco is also signed up to testify, who should also be representing that Union. Oren, you may go ahead.

SERGEANT LEONARDO: Starting time.

OREN BARZILAY: Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

SERGEANT LEONARDO: We hear you.

OREN BARZILAY: Thank you. Good afternoon, Speaker, Chairpersons, and Committee Honorable Council Members. My name is Oren Barzilay. I'm a 25-year veteran of FDNY EMS, and I am the president of Local 2507.

I am here today to speak on behalf of more than 4,000 FNDY EMTs, paramedics, and fire inspectors. We are New York's frontline medical first responders yet for years our Union leadership and members have asked, begged, and pleaded for enhanced resources required to do our job more effectively, number one, as medical first responders of the FDNY, and number two as the City's fire safety inspectors whose job is to ensure building fire safety. Instead

of getting the resources we need, we have been receiving constant lip service instead.

My message today, New York City leaders must stop starving EMS of resources. If you grew up in a big family, you'll understand what it's like having nothing hand me downs. This is what it's like to in EMS inside the FDNY.

For example, the City long ago committed to building 70 EMS stations in strategic neighborhoods across the city. While talk is indeed cheap, many years later, 25 to be exact, we are still waiting. We have told the Council about the horrific low wages. EMS members are paid about 40 to 50 percent less than New York's other great first responders. In Boston, EMS makes only 2 percent less than police and fire. Where is the wage equity or fairness for our mostly women and minority EMS workforce?

Our FDNY EMTs and paramedics answer about 80 percent of all FDNY's 9-1-1 emergencies, yet our operating budget is not commiserate. Those poverty wages and throw in difficult work conditions result in EMS losing an average of 30 percent of new hires within 3 years and 50 percent in 5 years.

Look at it in another way, the City of New York spends a fortune training EMS medical professionals and pays them so little that they leave in droves for jobs in other cities with private companies easily making 20 to 30,000 a pay year.

Without a doubt, FDNY EMS is the undernourished side of the FDNY. Since the merger 26 years ago, there has been a systematic lack of reinvestment in our people and the tools needed to do our job. EMS members city-wide often must idle in their vehicles on street corners in the dead cold or winter...

SERGEANT LEONARDO: Time expired.

OREN BARZILAY: Or hottest days of summer while EMS stations we do have are either so old and decrepit or they're overfilled with staff. Translation, we completely lack for a safe workplace. In the Bronx, Station 17 which is so decrepit that it's floor is held up by dozens of floor jacks hidden in the basement. Without those, the building would collapse. Mayor de Blasio even did a dog and pony show 5 years ago to spotlight how bad and dangerous it was.

That administration made a commitment to fixing it. After the photo op was done, the will went

away. Nothing has been fixed, and nothing has changed. It's the same story over and over again. EMS stations overcrowding is another serious problem. Stations meant to serve 50 to 60 people have over 100 crowding in. Several stations in the Bronx to have 10, 11 EMS units working from them have now 20 crammed in. Even before the pandemic, the Bronx was the busiest borough for 9-1-1 emergency calls and we were told to expect to have 6 new EMS stations. Guess what. While EMS 9-1-1 call volumes soar, not a single new station in-house in the pipeline. If you hear otherwise, it's likely more lip service.

In fact, the Bronx is so starved of EMS resources that one entire station from Queens, the Queens Tactical Response Group, is dispatched each and every day over the bridge just to keep up with the soaring level of medical emergencies in the Bronx, but that trend is truly city-wide. For Rockaway Queens, we have just 1 EMS station and 1 hospital to serve the entire peninsula and those communities around it. To compensate, EMS is always borrowing units from the mainland and despite more and more people being (INAUDIBLE) Rockaway, the City is not investing what is needed to address growing population. The refusal to add new EMS stations means

lack of rapid response times city-wide. Because we are perceived as a second class within the firefighting agency, whenever a firehouse has become too old for the firefighters, we get the hand me downs.

The dedicated women and men of EMS and the citizens we are sworn to protect deserve better working conditions than we have been subject to. It's time to make the FDNY EMS more central to the strategic planning of the greatest fire department in the world, but perhaps it's time to evolve that thinking to also consider the truly great work of our EMTs, paramedics, and fire inspectors.

Thank you for hearing me out. This is my testimony. If I'm allowed, I have some things I would like to speak of regarding what the previous speakers have said.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Yes, please do.

OREN BARZILAY: One second. I'm sorry. The Department testified on a few items that are quite frankly alarming. What they did not say to this Committee is that on April 3rd there will be a reduction of units in communities receiving EMS response. Numerous ambulances will be pulled out of the system and completely deleted. Many neighborhoods

in the Bronx and across the city. They speak about vehicle maintenance. We have dozens of crew members sitting around the stations each and every day because there's no ambulances available for them to be placed on. The Department talks about a peer support counseling service unit, which is a well-known fact is not designed for EMS. It is a program established for firefighters. While they too deserve to be treated with mental health, our members are neglected. We have members who are constantly not receiving return phone calls while left to struggle and deal with it on their own. We have been begging the Department for years for additional counselors and better mental health for our people. Our members are exposed to mental health issues on a daily basis. The tragedies, the assaults, the violence they see has caused 3 of our members to take their lives in the past 3 years. It is only then they decided to activate and engage in the peer support program that does nothing for our members. Our members need professional help. Assaults, one week from today will be 5 years since the death and killing of Yadira Arroyo. The killer has yet to be brought to trial. Not yet has anyone who assaulted a member of FDNY EMS has been charged with a felony. All the assaults that

our members are exposed to are being brought and dropped down to either a misdemeanor or a desk appearance ticket. The Department does nothing to protect our men and women.

I appreciate Council Member Holder for suggesting our men and women may be supplied with mace to protect themselves. When we brought that suggestion, that was not acceptable, but it's okay for our men and women to be sent to the hospital with broken noses, broken arms, broken legs from being constantly assaulted, being placed on 30-day cocktail that makes our members sick because of the strong antibiotics they're being placed on after being spit on.

The computer-aided dispatch system is a joke. Every child on his cell phone has a GPS application applied to it. Our members have to use their own personal cell phones to get to sites. Our CAD system, they have invested millions of dollars in it, and it still doesn't give them the way how to get to a call.

Our academy, I ask all of you to take a day and come see our EMS academy. It is so short-staffed, and the facility is so small that we have to rent buildings now to train our people. There is no

room to continue education of our men and women.

They're constantly canceling classes or rescheduling classes because we can't keep up.

The starting salary as the Council Member Holden mentioned is 39,000 dollars. Top pay EMT is 59,000 dollars. Even top pay today is a joke, 59,000 dollars, after this wage increase that we received. The Mayor constantly, the previous administration I should be more clear, has denied recognizing us as a uniform status and has denied and refused to give us equality among our other first responders.

Just like week alone, Target has announced that minimum wage for its employees will be 24 dollars an hour. The starting salary for EMT in New York City is 18 dollars an hour. Our members are leaving this job in droves. Nobody stays here. It is financially impossible to survive on 18 dollars an hour.

I'll take any questions that you may have for me.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Mr. Barzilay, I just want to thank you for your testimony, and it is compelling that drastic change needs to come for EMS, for the Department, for the workers, and I know Council Member Holden has fought for you and now I'm

here on the City Council and I will fight for EMS as well.

OREN BARZILAY: I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

COUNSEL JOSH KINGSLEY: We will now turn to Council Member Holden for questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Oren. Thank you, Chair. What a picture you painted, Oren. Very depressing, but just think about what EMS workers go through on a daily basis. Their work everyday, they're seeing horrific scenes that most of us would not be able to even look at. They have to deal with it. They came upon accidents that are absolute nightmares. They might see the death of a child, which they have to take that home, and to do it and get paid so little is an insult, is a disgrace. Oren, I have a question because I do speak to EMS workers a lot. If the Council Members take the time and talk to them, they'll understand what it is to be an EMS worker in New York City. They are disrespected. The previous administration didn't listen, never listened on so many levels, but I want to ask you, Oren. What about the Adams administration? Have they reached out? Have you

spoken to them about the horrific conditions, especially the short staff?

OREN BARZILAY: Yeah, I've met with his staff, and I've spoken to him a few times, but unfortunately it's been extremely busy for him with the crime levels in our city so we're giving him a little time to deal with the crime in our city. Hopefully, we'll be able to resolve some of these issues in the near future, but he does have an open ear to us which is different than what the previous administration had and hopefully we'll get this resolved.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: One thing I remember writing letters during the pandemic, could you talk about initially trying to get the vaccine for EMS workers. At first, they didn't want to do it during your working hours. They wanted to do it on the EMS workers' own time, and we had to fight even for that, to get vaccines done on work time as it should be. Can you tell us initially what happened with that?

OREN BARZILAY: Initially when the vaccination became available, EMS wasn't included. We had to contact the state and plead with them to include EMS in the first round. It still had to be

done on your own time. They made it available to us. There was no pushback, but it had to be done on your own time. Speaking about your own time, when our members are exposed to PTSD, unlike other agencies, and our PTSD is tenfold than any other first responders, we have to use our own sick leave time. We can't even be excused from the trauma that we are exposed to. They keep telling us well you have to negotiate that. That's a bargaining issue. When our members saw 17 dead bodies at that fire last year, that is a traumatic event to everybody and for us not to be able to decompress is bizarre in a day and age where we know that PTSD is real.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Especially when you see the bodies and then many of them children. You never lose that image. It stays with you and it takes its toll on you and the fact that they're not putting the resource into post-traumatic stress is another disgrace. We have our work to do in the Council. I'll stand by you. I know the Chair will also because we believe in the work that EMS workers do on a daily basis and they were out there on the front lines during the pandemic and were not treated well by the previous administration so we're going to work hard on this, but thank you, Oren, for

unbelievable testimony. You heard today from the Fire Department essentially leadership saying it's a collective bargaining thing. I think the FDNY leadership has to stand by you and certainly EMS workers. Thank you, Oren.

OREN BARZILAY: Thank you, sir.

STEPHANIE RUIZ: Thank you. We'll now hear from Michael Greco followed by Michael Reardon. Mr. Greco, you may begin when ready.

MICHAEL GRECO: Good afternoon, everybody. Good afternoon, Chair, Council Members. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak. My name is Michael Greco. I'm the vice president of Local 2507. I've been working with Oren for many years regarding the issue of the inequities that face EMS, and my whole testimony today was really just about rebutting some of the budgetary items that they put in. Hearing Oren's testimony and understanding that you all understand our plight, I want to point to some things in the budget that just need a fundamental shift on how EMS is viewed.

When this pandemic hit, I testified in front of the Health and Hospital Committee, March 5, 2020. This is right before this turned into a pandemic and the city shut down. I sounded alarm

bells of how bad EMS is going to be if we increase the call volume by just 500 to 1,000 calls and you saw what happened. EMS basically needed a rescue of our own. 500 members from across the country had to come just to help bail us out. Then you'd think we learn from our mistakes. Now the Omicron wave hits, and we have to bring more people in. That was a year and a half. It's recent memory, and we still need people to come in. We're talking about crime coming up right now. We're talking fires at a very rampant increase. Did we call Mutual Aid to help us deal with the police surge that is needed? No. We staffed them to a proper level to increase this. Have we asked neighboring counties to come with fire trucks? Long Island per capita the highest fire truck community in all the country. Have we asked them to come in and help with the fire? No. Because there's a major difference between at staffing level and being understaffed. We can still be at staffing level and be horribly understaffed, and that's what EMS is. We are systematically understaffed. Very few people us the nuances behind an ambulance sitting on their corner. A firehouse is open 24 hours a day. Nobody says I'm sorry, between the hours of 11 at night and 9 in the morning, we don't run. Numerous, hundreds of

ambulances across our city are staffed at a 12 or 16-hour level, and then we put them to bed on the overnight. Communities are now losing like Oren has led to because of a complete revamp of the 9-1-1 system that is about to come in on April 3rd which really has very little oversight from a safety committee, from anybody, is about to embarked. Communities, which I just spoke at Community Board 8, they're going to be losing ambulances.

SERGEANT LEONARDO: Time expired.

MICHAEL GRECO: That's really what I want to say. I know I'm running out of time, but there's a couple more things if I'm allowed to.

The fire inspectors which are tasked with keeping our city safe and protected as well, they were relocated and put onto COVID task force for the past year and a half. Their job, instead of checking buildings, was to make sure that a restaurant was complying with the vaccine mandate. If you mean to tell me that that doesn't have an effect on the backlog, it obviously does. They utilize our resources so bad. They treat us so bad. I heard the Fire Department invite you to Randall's Island to take a look at the training center and all the things that the 274 millions dollars, when you're done

touring the beautiful Randall's Island, I would like you to tour the EMS facilities with the hundred-year-old buildings that are falling apart, the space heaters that we have because the heat goes down for a week, the condemned buildings across the field from us, the raccoons that are flying around. That's what I would invite you to see to maybe understand the perspective of the second-class citizens that we on EMS are.

In March 2020, our response times went to almost 20 minutes because of the pandemic. In December 2021, our response time almost went the same because of a pandemic. EMS has been running on red line for 2 years so the mental health that we need help on is serious. They're going to talk about their peer counseling network. They can't staff the peer counseling network because they afford to lose the EMTs and paramedics in the field so they're placed on a GroupMe, and when a situation happens they put like a call into there and say is anybody available when they're home in the middle of the night, we don't have a staff to go there because we're understaffed, but yet they talk about sending fire trucks throughout the city to do these programs to schools. We would love to go teach CPR and teach health and

safety to kids. We're run so rampant. We need help.

At 4,200 members, we are wholly understaffed so I don't like them turning around and saying that EMS is staffed to proper levels. That's a budgetary (INAUDIBLE). That's (INAUDIBLE) That is where some of these budgetary items should be asked for, and that's what we need here at EMS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: We hear you loud and clear, Mr. Greco. Thank you.

STEPHANIE RUIZ: Thank you. It appears we have a question from Council Member Holden.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Michael, for that testimony. I just have a question because I didn't some of what you mentioned that's even more alarming. You're saying that fire inspectors were reassigned during the pandemic to go to restaurants and enforce regulations. I guess we're short-staffed on fire inspectors, right?

MICHAEL GRECO: Correct. There under staffing levels, and I believe Oren can give you the exact numbers but yes. There was a task force. It was actually called the COVID Task Force and they got pulled from all different units to staff this. Oren would definitely be able to give you...

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So as a result, it could be that some of these tragic fires that happened in New York City is a result of reassigning fire inspectors.

MICHAEL GRECO: I don't want to be hyperbolic, but what I do know is that our fire inspectors with their programs of inspecting buildings have significantly added to the safety and the human toll that has been taken over the years so it's an easy conclusion that if they're not checking standpipes, they're not checking what they're supposed to check then we're going to have a little extra loss of life that they have been instrumental in protecting. Fire inspectors have, and this isn't hyperbolic, they have saved more lives in the past 20 years with the way the inspections have gone than they're given credit for, and their staffing level should be increased and they should be recognized for the safety that they bring to not only the public but all the visitors and all the tourists to our great city. Fire inspectors are an unsung division of the fire department.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So the fire inspectors being reassigned to other duties, it stands to reason it's jeopardizing our buildings,

especially the high rises for these catastrophic fires. I just want to touch upon the fact that we need more fire inspectors, and you heard the Acting Commissioner couldn't give us really a concrete answer as to what's the schedule of inspections, are they yearly. I asked twice, and I couldn't get an answer really so that's something we have to bring up, Chair, to the administration, especially in budget time. There's a lot to be fixed here, and we can't treat EMS workers and we can't treat fire inspectors like they're just here and we can just do what we want and we don't have to pay them enough and we can reassign them at will. They should not be reassigned to do COVID work or inspections other than fire prevention. I think that we do have some issues to bring up, Chair, but thank you, Michael.

MICHAEL GRECO: You're welcome. Thank you for...

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: We first have to make sure that they are reassigned where they're supposed to be and they're not going in and just harassing small business owners and giving them fines when buildings are burning and people are dying.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Chair, that explains why the same businesses were visited by

Consumer Affairs, Health Department, and now, I didn't know, fire inspectors. I mean that to me is outrageous. I just can't begin to say how poorly EMS workers and fire inspectors were treated under the de Blasio administration. I will be meeting with the Deputy Mayor actually tomorrow, and I'll bring this up also. Thank you, both. Thanks, Michael. Thanks, Oren.

OREN BARZILAY: Just so you know, we brought this up to the Deputy Mayor 2 weeks ago. I have Michael Reardon who is a Chief Fire Inspector who is going to talk about the task force and how they were pulled away instead of doing building inspections. Ironically, that tragic death in the Bronx, that building was scheduled to be inspected but because they were sent to a task force that building was not inspected. The same thing happened in that Brooklyn explosion, that building was scheduled for inspection but because the task force was sent to inspect COVID sites, that building was not inspected either. It's problematic.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I do think we have the picture, and I think that you both make very compelling statements, and Council Member Holden and I are in sync on making sure that the current

administration is aware of what was taking place and making sure that it is not still taking place and that you do receive what you need and the fire inspectors go back to what they need to do as Council Member Holden said.

OREN BARZILAY: As of last week when the mask mandate dropped by the Mayor's office, that's when they canceled all our fire inspectors from going so they sent them back now to headquarters to start doing inspections so that came to an end.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: That's good news.

STEPHANIE RUIZ: Thank you. We will now hear from Michael Reardon. Mr. Reardon, you may begin when ready.

MICHAEL REARDON: My name is Michael Reardon. I'm the Deputy Chief in the Bureau of Fire Prevention. I've been on the job for 40 years. I sit on the Executive Board 2507 EMT, Paramedics, and Fire Inspectors. I would like to thank City Council Members for allowing me to speak on behalf of my brothers and sisters in the Bureau of Fire Prevention.

Fire Prevention inspections generate about 77 million dollars a year. During the pandemic the last few years, our inspections dropped

dramatically leaving the city unsafe because several of our units and manpower were mandated by Mayor de Blasio to hand out masks in the public and to inspect restaurants to check for compliance which is the Health Department's job in the 5 boroughs.

During the pandemic, we were not able to test and perform all our inspections. Testing fire protection systems such as sprinkling systems, standpipe systems, rain hood systems in the restaurants, construction sites, places of public assembly, hazardous cargo trucks carrying gasoline and diesel, service stations, private fueling stations in the 5 boroughs. Refrigeration units, oil burning units, storage of aerosols and VRS service stations.

We had about 450 inspectors. We are down between 99 to about 130 inspectors leaving to new jobs such as going to the fire department or retirement or health reasons. It's important that we continue to hire more fire inspectors for the following reasons.

Fire prevention inspectors are out there in the field working hard in the 5 boroughs to make sure our firefighters, the public, and all visitors who come to the City on vacation are safe by making

sure that all types of fire protection systems such as sprinkler and standpipe systems, dry chemical fire suppression systems, foam fire protection systems are inspected, tested, and in perfect working condition.

SERGEANT LEONARDO: Time expired.

MICHAEL REARDON: Always looking for hazardous and unsafe violations during the inspection in all the facilities we inspect.

Fire prevention inspectors are out inspecting high rise buildings, restaurants, places of public assembly, all types of commercial buildings, construction sites, power plants, methane recovery facilities, LNG which is liquid natural gas facilities, compressed natural gas facilities, services, private fueling facilities, pipelines providing jet fuel, gasoline, fuel oil to JFK airport and to LaGuardia airport, also going to junk yards, scrap metal yards, storing unsafe hazardous materials in buildings and in box trucks, inspecting gasoline and fuel oil tanker trucks. We have a laboratory unit also inspecting the hospitals. We do task force and shelters in the city. We do illegal conversion task force also. District offices are checking for refrigeration units on the rooftop of buildings as well as checking for aerosol storage and VRS

stations. We also supervise fireworks displays in all the boroughs.

Fires are down due to fire prevention inspectors, the work they do. Units are required to travel in 5 boroughs and sometimes respond to emergencies without department vehicles.

Fire prevention units lost cars due to high mileage and never was replaced. Some were taken away and given to chiefs on the firefighter side who come to (INAUDIBLE) That's my statement. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you, Mr. Reardon.

MICHAEL REARDON: I'll take any questions you have.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I don't have a question but I just want to further the statement that said we really do hear you loud and clear, and we know that we have a lot of work to do on your behalf. You really do have partners in us, and that's why we remained, we want to hear what you have to say because you know it from the streets, and you don't know it from the inside of what we're hearing so when we get your perspective, it makes such a big difference in how we act when we go into the City

Council, when we meet with Deputy Mayors, or we meet with the Mayor himself, and there are so many things that need to be changed from the previous administration to now and I think that we do have a mayor that is listening so we're in a very good position, but I don't know if any of my other Colleagues have any other questions or statements to make.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Chair, may I?

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Yes, of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chief, for that testimony. Just a question on the numbers. You said there's 450 fire inspectors?

MICHAEL REARDON: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. During COVID, how many were reassigned to check on restaurants and other businesses?

MICHAEL REARDON: About 90.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So about 90...

MICHAEL REARDON: (INAUDIBLE) sprinkler standpipe unit which tests all the sprinkler systems and standpipe systems in the buildings and our range hood unit which does all the restaurants (INAUDIBLE) downsized to the point that some units were unable to do all the inspections they needed to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So the...

MICHAEL REARDON: Through the whole pandemic, fire prevention never stopped working.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Can you come up with a number of how many inspections were actually done during COVID because of the reassignment? Were we down by half or three-quarters because that's a very important number because of the horrific fires? We have to learn a lesson that during a crisis that we don't reassign inspectors that save lives in other areas so we may have some 90 inspectors go around and fine businesses for masks or whatever else they did but they were taken away from other areas that actually cost lives by not inspecting the buildings so do you have a number on this, like of the 90 inspectors that were taken away, how many inspections were actually done or lost?

MICHAEL REARDON: I would have to go to each number and see if they have numbers on that. I can see if I can get those numbers for you.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

MICHAEL REARDON: I'll get them on all the units that I had mentioned.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Let's just take into consideration that it is unconscionable that fire inspectors that have such an important job that really prevent the loss of life would be utilized to hand out masks. That is just unconscionable. I thank you for your testimony, and we look forward to making sure that these wrongs are righted on your behalf.

MICHAEL REARDON: Thank you for listening to me today. I appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you for enlightening us.

STEPHANIE RUIZ: Thank you. If there's any member of the public that has not yet had an opportunity to testify, please use the raise hand function in Zoom now and I'll call on you to speak.

Seeing no hands raised in Zoom, that completes the public portion, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you. I just want to thank everyone for coming on. I want to thank all of you that testified, Oren and Michael and Michael Reardon, for your compelling testimony that was really eye-opening and enlightening. My Colleagues in government, thank you for waiting it out to the very end to make sure that you heard everything that needed to be done. I want to thank

our Committee once again for their hard work, our financial analyst Jack Kern, our unit head Isha Wright, our committee counsel Josh Kingsley, our political analyst Will Hongach, and my chief of staff Phyllis Inserillo who really keeps me on course.

I look forward to the next hearing. I hope that we can have answers for you prior to the next hearing. We will work hard to make sure we can address many, if not all, of the issues that you have brought to light because they are issues that need to be addressed because as I said if you're not able to do your job because you're reassigned or you don't have the ability because you're sick and someone is having PTSD and not being taken care of or you're being excluded from vaccinations, all of that reflects on us and the way we represent you so that we just cannot have.

What was in the last administration, we all know was nothing short of an abomination, and we're hoping that in this administration and I am very encouraged that we will see all of those policies reversed and that EMS will start to get the recognition that they deserve. I come from a background from a hospital network, and I saw how very hard our EMS workers were working through the

COVID. While we were all locked behind doors, you guys were out there not knowing at the time what the risks were, and for that I applaud you and I thank you. I know that lives were lost from your divisions because of that. If there's nothing else, I will bang the gavel 3 times and call an end to the hearing. Thank you so much. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 14, 2022