

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department



Chief of the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department
Confirmation Resolution of 2015 (PR21-0165)

Testimony of

Gregory M. Dean

Nominee and Acting Fire and EMS Chief

Before the

Committee on the Judiciary

Council of the District of Columbia

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1:00 PM



Good morning Chairperson McDuffie, other Council members and staff of the Committee. I am Gregory Dean, Acting Chief of the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. I am pleased to testify before you today as Mayor Muriel Bowser's nominee to become Chief of the Department. Thank you to Mayor Bowser for providing me with the opportunity to lead the District's Fire and EMS Department. I would also like to thank the men and women of our Department, who are very committed to delivering outstanding services for residents and visitors of the District of Columbia.

Chairperson McDuffie, prior to being recruited by Mayor Bowser, I served as the Fire Chief for Seattle, Washington, over a period of the last 10 years. I retired after serving a total of 44 years with the Department. During my time with Seattle, I was promoted through the ranks and served as a Lieutenant, Captain, Battalion Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief and, beginning in 2004, Fire Chief. My previous responsibilities included Deputy Chief of Support Services, Deputy Chief of Personnel, Assistant Chief of Administration and Fire Marshal. As Fire Chief of Seattle, I administered a \$175 million budget and was responsible for leading a 1,150 member department. I have numerous professional qualifications as indicated by my attached resume, including a Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems. I was selected to attend the Master's Program at the Naval Post Graduate School for Homeland Defense and Security in 2005. I am a member of the International Association of Fire Chief's Terrorism and Homeland Security Committee and served as the previous Chairperson of the Region 6 Homeland Security Administration and Policy Group. I was first certified as an Emergency Medical



Technician through the Harborview Medical Center EMT Training Program in 1972, and served on the board for the Medic One Foundation, one of the longest and continuous running EMS and Paramedic training programs in the nation.

Before starting work as the Acting Fire and EMS Chief of our Department this May, my goal was to begin a six month process of reviewing and evaluating Department services to better understand how we work and which direction we need to take for future improvement. This process continues and includes extensive meetings with Chief Officers, Managers, Union Leaders, front-line employees, community stakeholders and public interest groups. I have also enjoyed visiting fire stations as often as I can to informally talk to men and women about their priorities and ideas and to answer questions they may have.

A number of high priority issues require immediate attention, including our hiring processes for entry level firefighter and paramedic employees. The increase in EMS call load has had an impact on all other aspects of the organization. Improvement in the management of our fleet repairs, availability and replacement of emergency apparatus such as fire trucks and ambulances. Resolving communication challenges after the installation of upgraded technology. And an ongoing review of our training programs provided to our members.

Prior to my arrival, I began to work with Mayor Bowser and the Office of the City Administrator to address our recruitment of DC residents while addressing an



immediate need for additional personnel. We completed the first phase of the hiring process last Saturday, June 27th. Over two exam days, we tested approximately 4,000 applicants, of which approximately 1,900 were DC residents. Additionally, the Department hired 27 Firefighter-EMTs and 10 Firefighter-Paramedics with previous training and experience. We are also currently training in the academy seven formerly single role Paramedics to become Firefighter-Paramedics.

Managing the growing number of emergency calls, especially for EMS, remains a challenging issue. Fire and EMS calls have increased by 15% since 2013, and continue to outpace last year's monthly call volumes. May of 2015 was an all-time call record month for our Department, with fire trucks and ambulances responding on more than 17,500 emergencies and transporting more than 10,000 patients to local hospitals. Many of these patient transports were for lower priority EMS calls, with only one in five calls needing a Paramedic to assist a patient during transport to a hospital. To keep pace with this growing demand, our Department placed 10 additional ambulances in service on weekdays beginning in March, but EMS call volume continues to test this added capacity. We are working closely with the OUC to better identify and more quickly manage high priority 9-1-1 call taking and dispatching, in order to provide service as quickly as possible. Beginning on June 15th, we placed Paramedic Officers in three hospitals to assist ambulance crews with retuning to service more quickly after transporting patients. Initial results of this program look promising, with the average time ambulances spent at one hospital reduced by 14 minutes (or 26%) for patients who were transported. Trying to keep pace with this growing demand places incredible



pressure on our people, vehicles and equipment, not easily resolved by simply expanding service capacity.

To improve the reliability of emergency apparatus, we continue to prioritize the repair and replacement of out-of-service vehicles, especially aerial ladder trucks. Currently, four of the six aerial ladder trucks previously removed from service for repairs were returned to service in front-line capacity, allowing our Department to have 15 of 16 truck companies in service. Last week we had all 16 truck companies in-service. This was the first time since September, 2014 that all 16 ladder companies had been in service. Our Department anticipates delivery of five new aerial ladder trucks during the months of July to September, which will restore a working reserve fleet for this type apparatus. To continue our investment in the emergency apparatus fleet, the Department's proposed capital budget for FY 2016 and beyond was substantially increased by Mayor Bowser to allow for additional emergency vehicle purchases. Furthermore, planned apparatus purchasing will follow the replacement schedule recommended by the BDA Global "Audit and Assessment" report completed during November, 2013, at least through FY 2017.

Our Department is working very closely with the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) and the Office of the City Administrator to improve reliability of tablet computer communications across wireless networks. Previously, not all tablet computers were reliably broadcasting emergency unit location and status information to the OUC's computer aided dispatch (CAD) system. To improve reliability, tablet computers were



reconfigured with updated software. This is resulting in better connectivity and substantially improving reliability. Additionally, network connectivity of tablet computers is now monitored hourly, with problems or issues more quickly identified and resolved.

The tragic Metro Tunnel fire on January 12 of this year highlights the importance of ongoing training in all phases of our emergency incident delivery system. Currently, more than 1,200 personnel have completed Metro rail car training. Although 80% of the calls we respond to are for EMS, the remaining 20% of calls often place the public and our members at high risk for injury or death from fires, technical rescues and special hazards. Realistic and focused training to improve situational awareness, increase skill levels and develop a broader range of knowledge, skills and abilities to support an “all hazard” workforce must be regularly scheduled and attended by operational personnel while on duty.

As I discussed previously, we have begun a six month process of reviewing and evaluating Department services to better understand how we work and which direction we need to take for future improvement. We recently created a new organizational chart that reflects the Department’s priorities. We re-created the position of Assistant Chief of Emergency Medical Services. I appointed Edward Mills, III, who served as Interim Fire and EMS Chief from March to early May, into this position. Dr. Juliette Saussy has been chosen as the new Medical Director, who will begin working with us in late July. The Department’s plan, with the support of Mayor Bowser, is to formulate a strategy for



substantial and meaningful change which will require an appropriate investment in people, resources and training as part of the FY 2017 budget formulation process.

The Challenges facing the DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services did not occur overnight, but working collaboratively with the Mayor's Office, the Council, Labor, the community and our personnel, I feel we can make great strides at identifying and improving the readiness of this great organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering any questions you or the Committee may have.

