

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT



Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Hearing

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Charles Allen, Chairperson

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Good afternoon, Chairperson Allen, councilmembers, and staff. I am John A. Donnelly, Chief of the D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (the Department). I am here today to testify in support of Mayor Muriel Bowser’s Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budget. For those of you watching from home, my testimony is available on our website at FEMS.DC.gov.

The Mayor’s FY23 budget proposal builds on the Recovery Budget we put forward last year to bolster core city services, improve the experience of residents and businesses interacting with the District government, and provide greater opportunity for residents to learn, grow, and thrive.

Before I begin my testimony, I want to publicly recognize and thank our employees for their hard work and dedication during one of the most challenging years of the Department’s 150-year history. Their performance and actions – consistent with our core values of Bravery, Accountability, Safety, Integrity, Compassion, and Service (what we call the B.A.S.I.C.S.) – has earned our Department the trust that is the basis for the significant investments the Mayor has proposed.



The FY23 proposed gross operating budget for the Department is \$315,999,944, which funds 2,263 employees. This is a 2.8 percent increase over the FY22 approved gross budget of \$307.4 million. The budget is comprised of \$269.2 million in Local funds and \$46.8 million in federal resources.

A. Operating Budget

The following is a summary of our operating budget enhancements:

- **Budgeting to the Staffing Factor:** The FY23 budget contains \$4.7 million to address the Department’s need to achieve full staffing. This budget funds 34 Firefighter/EMTs and 16 Firefighter/Paramedics over our regular hiring in FY23.

FEMS has a current operations staffing need – the staffing factor – of 1.41 FTEs for every apparatus seat that needs to be filled every day on every shift. Since each seat must be filled 100% of the time, any type of leave creates the need to backfill a seat on over-time at the cost of 1.5 times the salary rate. As the Committee is aware, this is a unique problem to FEMS—other agencies can leave open positions vacant without incurring overtime.

The Department will work towards achieving (but not completely achieve) the staffing factor of 1.41 during FY23 with an additional 50 FTEs, which we believe we can hire and have the capacity to train to overcome our attrition.

The impact of fully funding to the staffing factor will be to reduce overtime spending in the future, decrease employee burnout (which we have seen a lot of during 2021 because of COVID-19 related vacancies), and provide more reliable staffing and deployment of

resources. This, in turn, will improve service delivery for District residents and visitors who call 911 for life threatening emergencies.

- **Firefighter Facilities Quality of Life Enhancement initiative:** This \$1.15 million enhancement will expand on a successful FY22 initiative to provide FEMS with a modest budget to perform basic repairs and maintenance in firehouses rather than putting in work orders and waiting for service. We will make permanent the weekly cleaning of fire houses that was started during the Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department is the only large District agency without a dedicated cleaning contract.
- **Automated External Defibrillator Incentive Program:** The Department will implement a new program to incentivize the purchase and installation of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) across the District, providing for up to \$250,000 in rebates.¹ This program will reimburse small businesses, places of worship, small multi-unit apartment/condominium buildings, and non-profit organizations for their purchase and registration of AEDs across the District. The associated Budget Support Act (BSA) provision sets the limit for a rebate of up to \$400 for each AED installed in a building, with a maximum rebate of up to \$750 per building.

This proposal also aims to increase racial equity. In FY21 there were 916 cardiac arrests in the District, 83% of which occurred among African Americans. African Americans not only disproportionately experience cardiac arrests, but they are half as likely to survive cardiac arrest as white patients. We know that early bystander CPR and use of an AED significantly increase the likelihood of cardiac arrest survival.

In addition, the incidence of cardiac arrest is higher in those neighborhoods that also have the lowest number of AEDs. The Department program will prioritize the purchase and installation of AEDs in those neighborhoods, which are predominantly in Wards 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8, to address this disparity.

B. Medicaid Revenue Allocations

In FY22, we continue to benefit from the Department's shift to a Medicaid cost reimbursement structure for ambulance transports. Cost reimbursement means that we get reimbursed for the actual cost of providing EMS care and transport of Medicaid patients, rather than receiving flat transport fees. This change has resulted in a significant new revenue stream for the District and the EMS system. This revenue allows the Department to finally and reliably fund critical areas that have long competed for scarce resources, and at a level that is comparable to other agencies of its size and complexity.

The Mayor and the Department were able to allocate additional anticipated Medicaid revenue to fund several priorities. The following is a summary of these allocations:

¹ The Department will add one FTE to operationalize this program and develop the requirements for rebates.

- **Emergency Medical Services Pharmacist:** The Department will add a full-time board-certified pharmacist (PharmD) within the Office of the Medical Director to manage all aspects of the Department's pharmaceutical operation, from pricing and purchasing, to coordinating distribution, compliance and safety monitoring, and quality improvement review. We anticipate this change will significantly improve this program and lead to cost savings through professional pharmaceutical management.

The Department is the busiest provider of emergency medical care in the District of Columbia, responding to an average of 450-500 patients per day, with an annual pharmacy budget of \$800,000-\$900,000, easily the equivalent of a large medical facility. To our knowledge, we are the second largest EMS agency nationally – after the Los Angeles Fire Department – to adopt this innovative approach.

- **Uniformed Administrative Staffing:** We will staff additional uniformed administrative positions for the first time, including: a cardiac arrest peer review officer; an enhancement of dedicated staff for our Safety and EMS battalion chiefs; dedicated 24-7 staffing for the Fire Operations Center; and an Office of Internal Affairs officer. Each of these divisions provide critical support, resiliency, and safety measures for operations in the field, while also addressing long-standing challenges to Department staffing needs.
- **Information Technology Division Staffing:** The Department will supplement its Information Technology Division with several staff and contract engineering positions, plus funding for ongoing security enhancements. The IT Division has ten FTEs and no dedicated engineering staff, for an agency of 2,200 employees – thus it has one of the smallest IT FTE per employee ratios in the government. This allocation seeks to fund additional IT project management personnel, hardware, and software maintenance resources to support the needs and operations of the Department.
- **Uniform and Safety Gear:** Finally, the Department will dedicate funding to continue its multi-year focus on improving the availability of uniforms and safety gear, including appropriate footwear for members.

C. Capital Budget

The Department's capital budget for FY 2023 includes:

- **New Fleet Maintenance Reserve Facility and Engine 7 relocation:** The capital budget continues the design, renovation, relocation, project management, and commissioning costs associated with the construction of a new FEMS Fleet Maintenance and Logistics Facility at Blue Plains. The current allocations allow for construction to be completed by the end of FY25.

The capital budget provides funding in FY23 of \$2.5 million and FY24 of \$10 million for design and construction of a new Engine 7 since it is scheduled to be demolished as part of the redevelopment of Greenleaf Gardens. Engine 7 will be relocated to a new facility within its current response area.

- **Apparatus replacement schedule:** After years of effort on the part of the Mayor and Council, and the hard work of the Apparatus Division staff and leadership, the Department is seeing the benefit of continued and consistent investment in the maintenance and replacement of our apparatus. Our proposed budget continues this commitment.
- **Generator replacement:** The Department will spend \$1.5 million toward installation of new generators that provide 100% back up power at frontline FEMS facilities. This project will provide FEMS with the necessary infrastructure and equipment to guarantee that the front-line facilities with some of the most diminished generator capacity will be able to operate and serve the surrounding community in a moment of need.
- **Replacement of Fireboat 1 (John Glenn):** This project continues to be funded in FY26 to ensure our improved response to the growing waterfront area, well into the future.
- **Relocation and construction of new Engine 26:** The budget contains FY23 funding for continued design and engineering costs.
- **Completion of joint study with MPD on modernizing both Departments' Training Academies:** The purpose of the study is to determine the best use of the existing land and to find areas of common programming that can be utilized by both FEMS/MPD personnel, with the end goal of improving the ability of both organizations to train new cadets and existing staff. Our Training Academy is outdated and not a sufficiently large space for the Department's current operations.

D. Budget Support Act Provisions

The Department has two FY23 Budget Support Act proposals.

The "Emergency Medical Services Transport Contracts Amendment Act of 2022" would: (1) repeal the sunset date of the emergency medical services transport contract authority allowing a third-party provider (TPP) to transport eligible Basic Life Support (BLS) patients to the hospital; and (2) amend the existing reporting requirements.

Simply put, third-party BLS is the foundation of the progress the Department has made in EMS reform since 2016. The authority to contract with third parties to provide supplemental pre-hospital BLS medical care and transportation has been critical in helping the Department improve our EMS system by measures including patient outcomes, unit availability, ambulance response times, ambulance reserve and "up time," and our overall number of EMS training hours. The contracting authority was initially approved in 2016 and currently sunsets on September 30, 2023. Council has extended the sunset date twice. The Mayor has made a policy determination that FEMS providers should continue to transfer care to a third party for BLS transports under the existing protocols. Because of the ongoing improvements we have made in EMS care with the ability to supplement our BLS resources, the Department proposes making the authority permanent.

TPP is a cost-effective and efficient use of District resources for low acuity patients, freeing up Department providers for more acute medical emergencies at a significantly reduced cost to the District. Further, it would be exceedingly difficult for the Department to develop the staff required to make up for the work of this contractor. The Department would have to significantly ramp up training facility space and encounter a labor market with a significant shortage of available health care providers.

We are prepared to work with the Committee to ensure reporting requirements are continued consistent with the aims of the TPP program and Council oversight.

The “Automated External Defibrillator Incentive Program Act of 2022” clarifies the Department’s authority to operate the District’s public AED program, including AED deployment strategies, and liaison with District government agencies. The subtitle authorizes the Mayor to provide the rebates described above.



Chairperson Allen, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department’s FY23 proposed budget. The resources allocated by the Mayor will enable us to continue the transformation of the Fire and EMS Department. The Council and this Committee are critical allies in this effort, and I appreciate your work to ensure we operate a world-class Department. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we do so.

My team and I are available to answer any questions.