

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



Budget Oversight Hearing on

Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department

Testimony of
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Fire and EMS Chief

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairperson

April 10, 2024
John A. Wilson Building, Room

Good morning, Chairperson Pinto, councilmembers, and staff. I am John Donnelly, Chief of the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. I am pleased to testify in support of Mayor Muriel Bowser's Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) budget. For those of you watching from home, my testimony is available on our website at FEMS.DC.gov.

The FY 25 Fair Shot Proposed Budget and financial plan reflects many strategic investments and shared sacrifices across our government, with an emphasis on addressing a confluence of post-COVID factors and driving economic growth. The administration's FY25 investments were approached soberly and with financial prudence and guided by strategic principles to ensure we strike the right balance between investments and sacrifice. To this end, the Fire and EMS Department is aligned with the Mayor's vision to maintain and enhance core services, preserve investments that protect health and safety, and focus on new catalytic investments that center public safety, education, and Downtown. We are fortunate that even in tight times, the District remains well-resourced and able to continue delivering world-class programs and services.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize and thank the committed employees of Fire and EMS for their care and diligence in delivering services to the residents and visitors of the District of Columbia. The hard work and dedication of the nearly 2,300 employees of D.C.'s Bravest – firefighter EMTs and Paramedics, and civilians – has earned our Department the trust that is the basis for the significant investments the Mayor has proposed.



The FY25 proposed gross operating budget for the Department is \$369,339,115 which funds 2,268.5 employees. This is a 12.9 percent increase over the FY24 approved gross budget of \$327 million. The budget is comprised of \$302.1 million in local funds and \$67.2 million in federal resources.

A. Local Funds Budget

The proposed local funds budget includes an increase of \$12.4 million in enhancements and \$27.2 million to align personnel services and Fringe Benefits with projected costs, one new FTE, and a shift of eight existing FTEs from federal to local funding. The following is a summary of our operating budget enhancements:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (\$4,800,000)

The Mayor allocated a one-time enhancement of \$4.8 million for personal protective equipment (PPE). This investment will enable the Department to provide personnel with the necessary safety gear and equipment to enter immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) environments to perform firefighting activities while protecting their personal safety.

Firefighters are exposed to highly toxic substances, including a variety of carcinogens on the fire ground and more insidiously to an increasing range of infectious pathogens while caring for patients and at different emergency incidents. Structural PPE is among the most critical equipment used by every firefighter-EMT and firefighter-paramedic, providing protection from thermal, physical, environmental, and bloodborne pathogen hazards encountered during structural and proximity firefighting operations and emergency medical situations. Structural PPE is also the primary physical protection for firefighters from exposure to cancer-causing products of combustion.

Firefighting PPE is sized for each individual firefighter and must be replaced at regular intervals. Each firefighter is assigned two complete sets of PPE to allow for regular cleaning and to account for the possibility of catastrophic destruction of one set during or immediately after fire operations. This investment in the purchase and replacement of structural firefighting gear/ PPE, is not only in accordance with the Local 36 Collective Bargaining Agreement, but also consistent with manufacturer and National Fire Protection Association guidelines.

2. District of Columbia Paramedic School Operating Support (\$842,000)

The Department continues to lead an effort to develop a District of Columbia Paramedic School. In FY25, Mayor Bowser invested additional operations support and one FTE to support this effort. This enhancement is an example of our city's commitment to prioritizing programs that advance equity by preparing residents for solid middle-class health care professional careers. The Department began preparations for the paramedic school as part of the FY24 budget process. Since October 1, we have been able to develop a vision and create the building blocks toward this effort. A critical part of this process has been gaining deeper understanding of the current paramedic landscape, both locally and nationally, along with greater appreciation of our local university partners' interests and experiences. We are working collaboratively with stakeholders to train the next generation of homegrown paramedics in the District of Columbia.

In the interim, approximately 20 existing Fire and EMS members have started or are about to start their paramedic training using the funds provided by the Mayor and Council. Our effort is not limited to existing members however, and a critical marker of success will be the training of District residents not currently part of Fire and EMS.

3. Service to Maintain Fire Hydrants (\$6,797,000)

The Department's FY25 budget submission also includes an additional payment to DC Water for fire protection fees to cover the service and maintenance of the District's fire hydrant water supply and use. DC Water assesses this fee based on a rate study.

B. Capital Budget

The Department's capital budget for FY25 includes funding sufficient for apparatus purchases consistent with the Department's apparatus replacement plan. The Department continues to invest in fire apparatus engineered and built to provide maximum safety, longevity, and durability. These state-of-the-art vehicles allow us to provide maximum water flow for building fires and the ability for our ladders to reach 100' in our high-rise occupancies. The Capital Improvement Plan

continues to fund specialty vehicles such as our Mobile Command Unit and Mass Decontamination Units as well. The Department has incorporated green idle reduction technology to conserve fuel, reduce operating costs, improve operator safety and comfort, and protect the environment in all new ambulance purchases since 2021.

We are also pleased the capital budget again funds the Department's scheduled capital improvements program which provides the basis for station improvements at existing firehouses. Our firehouses are operated on a 24/7 basis and are subject to significant wear and tear. This funding has been critical in ensuring our members are safe and comfortable in these facilities.



Chairperson Pinto, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's FY25 proposed budget. The resources allocated by the Mayor will enable us to continue the life-saving work 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. We are available to answer any questions.