

**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

May 29, 2025
John A. Wilson Building, Room 123

Good afternoon, 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 2026 (FY26) budget. For those of you watching from home, my testimony is on our website at [FEMS.DC.gov](https://www.fems.dc.gov).

The Mayor's FY26 proposed budget and financial plan reflects the changing circumstances of the District's financial picture in 2025. In building the *Grow DC* budget, the Mayor was guided by our goals: growing DC's economy, rightsizing government spending, cutting red tape and making it easier to do business in DC, and investing in shared priorities.

As I shared with you in March at my performance oversight hearing, the employees of DC Fire and EMS have shown time and time again this year why we call them DC's Bravest. From the response and rescue of a resident trapped in a vehicle inside a burning and collapsed building to the heroic response to the plane crash over the Potomac River, I recognize and thank the committed employees of DC Fire and EMS for their care and diligence in delivering services to the residents and visitors of the District of Columbia.



The FY26 proposed gross operating budget for the Department is \$369.8 million, which funds 2,265 employees. The proposed budget reflects the following changes across funding categories:

- **Local Funds:** A net increase of **\$437,000**, from \$300.4 million in FY25 to \$300.8 million in FY 2026.
- **Special Purpose Revenue Funds:** A nominal net decrease of **\$1,000**, maintaining overall funding stability.
- **Federal Grant Funds:** A net increase of **\$66,000**, with the total rising slightly from \$67.167 million to \$67.233 million, primarily due to adjustments in contractual service needs.

Local Funds Budget

While the gross proposed budget is relatively static, the *Grow DC* budget includes \$7.3 million in targeted enhancements and reflects the Mayor's clear confidence in the dedication, professionalism, and critical lifesaving role of our Department in the community. These investments support both frontline operations and behind-the-scenes systems that enable our personnel to deliver life-saving services every day. The enhancements include:

- A **\$4.9 million one-time enhancement** in local funds to support third-party Basic Life Support transportation services for patients, as well as to bolster our ambulance billing infrastructure and Medicaid cost reporting operations. This funding will align the existing costs of services with our budget without the need for reprogramming later in the fiscal year.
- **Workforce and clinical support enhancements:** Supporting our workforce remains a top priority. The FY26 budget includes a \$1.0 million one-time enhancement to expand services provided through the Police and Fire clinic, reinforcing our commitment to employee mental health, occupational health, and injury prevention and \$50,000 to cover

the costs associated with hiring examinations, ensuring we continue to attract and evaluate the best-qualified candidates.

- **Safety and technology improvements:** Our agency continues to prioritize firefighter safety and operational resilience.
 - The FY26 budget provides **\$500,000** to supplement procurement of new firefighting safety gear like helmets and boots to account for marked increases in costs for goods over the last several years.
 - It also provides **\$350,000** to support the pre-hospital whole blood transfusion program. In its first year of operation, the Department transfused over 250 units of blood using this life-saving EMS intervention. This enhancement fully funds program operations which previously used funds reallocated from other needs.
 - An additional **\$447,000** is allocated for critical technology and security equipment that will enhance the safety, reliability, and cybersecurity posture of our operations. This enhancement will provide funding to ensure that the technology equipment at five firehouses meets the specifications established by the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO). These stations are no longer OCTO-compliant, with technological equipment beyond its useful life and not eligible for support. Without reliable network coverage, these firehouses will be without connectivity, and most importantly the firehouse station alerting system will be disconnected.
- **Realignment and efficiencies:** Finally, the Executive has proposed several adjustments aimed at increasing operational efficiency:
 - First, removal of **\$4.8 million in one-time funding** that was included in the FY25 budget for the purchase of structural personal protective equipment, which has concluded this cycle.
 - **\$867,000** in savings through internal efficiency improvements and cost containment measures.
 - **\$897,000** has been added to our local budget to reflect the permanent shift of \$860,000 and 7.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) from federal grants, along with \$37,000 in personnel service adjustments. This reflects positions converted from separated single-role providers, paid for Medicaid grant funding, to dual-role providers, paid for through local funds.
 - As part of a District-wide cost-saving measure, the agency's budget reflects a one-time **reduction of \$2.0 million** related to step increases and associated fringe benefits. This reduction spans both local and special purpose revenue funds and includes a \$72,000 decrease in federal grant allocations.

Capital Budget

A well-funded and consistently executed capital improvement plan is essential to sustaining the operational readiness, safety, and effectiveness of a modern fire and EMS department. Fire engines, ladder trucks, rescue units, and other specialized vehicles operate under demanding conditions and must be replaced on a regular lifecycle to ensure reliability, minimize downtime, and keep pace with evolving safety standards and technology. Delays in vehicle replacement increase the risk of mechanical failure during critical incidents and can place additional strain on frontline personnel.

The Mayor's FY26 capital budget continues to allow the Department to purchase and replace the apparatus we need. We also continue to experience extremely long lead times from purchase order to delivery and being able to place units in service. The Mayor's investments over the last ten years will allow us to manage these challenges, and we remain committed to ensuring our apparatus is service-ready when we need it most.

Equally important are the facilities that support our 24-hour live-work operations. Fire stations are not just garages for apparatus—they are homes, workplaces, and logistical hubs. Ongoing small capital investments are necessary to modernize these facilities, address deferred maintenance, improve energy efficiency, and ensure our personnel are working in safe, functional, and respectful environments. This includes upgrades to kitchens, bunkrooms, HVAC systems, physical fitness spaces, and IT infrastructure. The FY26 budget fully funds our **small capital improvements program with \$4.55 million plus \$1.5 million in funding continuing station generator replacement** which is critical to this effort.

Finally, the Mayor's capital budget fully funds the replacement of Fire Boat 1, the *John Glenn*, with **\$25.35 million in FY26 and \$7 million in FY27**. We are pleased to report the *John Glenn* has returned from dry dock and is ready to serve District waterways this summer season. The replacement of the *Glenn* has been a long-term goal of the Mayor, and we are grateful that we can fully proceed with the project. Design is, or is about to be underway, in FY25. Once design and engineering are complete, we will be able to begin construction. This is a long-term project; I have noted to this committee that engines and trucks are taking up to four years for construction. Construction of marine vessels, like our engines and trucks, will take time. But the District will benefit from a state-of-the-art purpose-built vessel.



Chairperson Pinto, this budget balances fiscal responsibility with strategic investments that strengthen our core mission: delivering exceptional public safety services to the residents of and visitors to our city. I appreciate the continued partnership and support of Mayor Bowser, this committee, and the Council. I welcome any questions you may have.