



April 15, 2024  
Testimony of Chief Michael Meyers, FDNY  
**“The State of FDNY Equipment”**

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Good morning Chair Ariola and members of the Fire & Emergency Management Committee. My name is Michael Meyers and I am the Chief of Safety at the New York City Fire Department. I am joined today by Deputy Chief Dan Murray of the FDNY Hazardous Materials (HazMat) Unit; Chief of Fleet Services Evan Sucheki, and Captain Mike Leo of the Robotics Unit. We thank you for the opportunity today to discuss FDNY Equipment.

As Chief of Safety, I oversee the safety of fire members, EMS members, and the civilians who work for the Department. Ours is a dangerous job. We can't reduce all risk, but the focus of the Safety Command is to reduce the risk to our members to the greatest degree possible.

My team consists of the Research & Development unit, which works with members and outside vendors to ensure that our tools and equipment are top of the line and are suitable to meet the needs of the department. It also includes the Firefighter Injury & Death Investigations unit, which undertakes an extensive review and investigation of all operations that result in the serious injury or death of a firefighter. As we often say, no member of the FDNY dies in vain. We know that the best way to honor a member who dies or suffers a serious injury is to learn from the incident and make any changes necessary to make operations safer for our members. Another

unit within Safety is the Handy-Talkie Recording Unit. We record all communications among members, so we routinely review communications from operations to understand what went right and what went wrong and where we can make improvements. Safety Command also includes three battalion chiefs and two captains who respond to Third Alarm fires and higher to assist at the scene of complex incidents.

We work with the FDNY Bureau of Health Services to understand injury trends so that we can assess whether any equipment or tools used in the field are malfunctioning or are not working properly for our needs so that we can make adjustments. We work with the Bureau of Training to make sure that they can use what we learn from our accident investigations to help improve member training and reduce the number of injuries that are suffered in the field. We work with Fire and EMS Operations to address methods and procedures in the field that are leading to unsafe conditions. We also consider it part of our mission to educate our members about safety issues and help them understand on an individual basis how to stay safe. We do this through producing literature, webcasts, and other educational materials. As an example, we have created materials to help members learn about their gear and personal protective equipment (PPE) so that they have an understanding of how their equipment works and how to make sure that they're using it in the safest way.

Historically, the Fire Department has moved forward in leaps and bounds in terms of the safety level of the gear that our members use when they operate at emergencies. When I joined the FDNY, we didn't use what is today referred to as "bunker gear." We had rubber boots, a helmet, and a fire coat. Over time, as a direct result of the attention that the Department has given to the

safety of equipment, our gear has evolved into a protective bunker gear ensemble. We have a very high bar for equipment to be used by FDNY firefighters. It has to be maneuverable; it has to be durable; and it has to provide the fire protection necessary to avoid burns and injuries.

Considering the number of burns and injuries that we regularly sustained using the equipment of my youth versus what our members operate with today, it's simply no comparison. Our members now have a significantly greater chance of ending their shift safely than at any time in the history of the FDNY. That's the metric that we use to measure our success: we want everybody to go home at the end of the day, and we will never stop improving our methods and our equipment to make sure our members have the best possible chance being safe.

My colleagues who are here with me today all have that same mission, and their units all contribute to that goal of safety in different ways. Chief Murray and his team at HazMat are experts in understanding how to safely deal with hazardous materials. They receive specialized training to identify and isolate hazards, protect first responders, and rescue and decontaminate potential victims. HazMat is trained to perform at a wide range of incidents, from minor spills or chemical releases to full-scale terrorism involving chemical, biological, radiation, nuclear, and explosive threats. In recent years, they have developed and executed procedures for handling incidents involving lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices. As this committee knows, lithium-ion batteries may present enormous challenges to firefighters, whether they were the source of the fire or become involved in a fire that originated from a separate cause. Even after a fire is extinguished, these batteries have shown a propensity for reignition and explosion. The Department has implemented a variety of procedures to respond effectively and as safely as possible. This includes responding companies submerging batteries until HazMat takes

possession, overpacking the materials, maintaining backup hoselines, and ensuring that these products - which emit dangerous toxins when compromised - are properly packed and transported after a fire incident.

Chief Sucheki oversees the FDNY's Fleet Services. His team keeps department apparatus in good repair and available for frontline first responders. The Department has roughly 2500 vehicles in all, including many specialized fire engines and EMS ambulances. Vehicles come in and out of FDNY repair shops for a variety of reasons, including preventative maintenance, accidents, replacing parts and equipment, and upgrades. Fire Department apparatus receive a lot of wear and tear, and EMS ambulances, in particular, operate at a near-constant basis, so they receive oil changes, break checks, tire inspections, and other preventative measures more frequently than the average consumer vehicle.

Lastly, Captain Leo's Robotics unit plays a vital role in innovation and enhancing Fire Department operations through cutting-edge technology. The Fire Department was the first city agency to operate a drone in the field. We've come a long way since the original models, which were tethered and limited in their maneuverability. Captain Leo's team monitors and reviews evolving drone technology on an ongoing basis, assessing new features and advances in design and upgrading the Fire Department's fleet so that we're using the best equipment to assist our members at incidents. Drone pilots receive extensive training that focuses on safely flying their aircraft, providing useful information, and doing so in a manner that preserves the privacy of individuals. Drones have become a tremendously valuable component of emergency response.

The information that they provide to incident commanders cannot be duplicated from the ground.  
We brought a video today that we think will give a clear idea of their utility.

The team has recently expanded to include robotics, including a “dog” that we would be glad to demonstrate for you and then take your questions.

Thank you.

**TESTIMONY OF OREN BARZILAY, PRESIDENT  
FDNY EMS, LOCAL 2507  
April 15, 2024**

Good morning, Committee Chairpersons, and Honorable Councilmembers.

My name is Oren Barzilay. I'm a 29-year veteran of the FDNY EMS and I am President of EMS Local 2507. I am here today to speak on behalf of more than 4,400 Uniformed FDNY EMTs, Paramedics & Fire Inspectors.

New York's EMTs and paramedics serve in the most renowned fire department in the country, and the world's busiest medical first responder agency. My members are tasked with responding to an incredibly large number of emergencies each year.

In 2023, EMS responded to 1,619,863 medical emergencies, another record setting year for the department and a nearly 40,000 increase from 2022.

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, responses by NYC medical first responders are up 14.67%. From 2003 to December 31, 2023, FDNY EMS members have responded to a staggering 28 million medical emergencies!

I am here today to spotlight very worrying issues for our city's EMS members, who despite their essential life-saving role protecting New Yorkers, are horrifically under-supported by our city government.

When firehouses are discarded by FDNY Fire because they are too antiquated and beyond their useful life, EMS inherits them and promptly doubles or triples the capacity of professional staff assigned there - packed in like sardines.

Originally, stations were meant to house 50-60 people but now some stations exceed capacity with over 100 staff people. Several stations in the Bronx started with 10-11 units but have since increased to over 20 units (or about 200 staff).

Many stations are over 100 years old and desperately need attention. The floor of Station 17 in the Bronx is held up with jacks. In 2017, Mayor DeBlasio held a press conference at the station saying the city will invest \$30 million in

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rebuilding stations, only for the department to spend it elsewhere. And so, seven years later, still no changes!

In a city council hearing before the pandemic, the department vowed to add 6 additional stations in the Bronx as our stations are overwhelmed and over staffed. None of that came to fruition. As a matter of fact, they shut down a station in February of this year, sending our personnel to already overcrowded stations. The call volume continues to climb but nothing has been done about adding new EMS infrastructure.

When you look at Staten Island, one of the larger boroughs, it has only 2 EMS stations. Our community and call volume metrics reflect that at least 1 additional station must be added to keep up with demand.

New York City has 11 percent fewer ambulances now, 516 in 2021 vs 461 last year. There is no plan by the city to keep up with the pace and skyrocketing demand for EMS services.

Instead, the city cut our budget at EMS by \$400,000. The overall Department budget went up by \$117.7 million, but none of that comes our way. In a massive \$2.35 billion FDNY budget, EMS gets only about 16%!

Significant emergency medical responses are up 15% for Bronx and Brooklyn residents, but the Bronx just lost an entire EMS company of 10 ambulances, so response times will go up even further in the coming months.

On top of that, we can't get reliable counseling services, even as some say we must provide unlimited mental health counseling to new arrivals from other countries staying at city shelters.

These complaints have fallen on deaf ears for several years. Even during the rollout of DeBlasio's billion-dollar ThriveNYC program, they refused to let my members access this service and we were not heard. In the past four years, there have been 11 suicides within the EMS community.

The State Comptroller just put out a disturbing report about the drastic shortage of EMS professionals across the state – a 17.5% drop-off from 2019 to 2022. Workplace conditions are rough and members are put in constant

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contact with communicable diseases, on top of a strict 20% overtime cap that simply is not imposed on other front line first responder agencies.

Our paramedics have the equivalent training of a nurse, yet nurses are making six figure salaries, almost double what paramedics make and three times what an EMT makes.

If the expectation is to keep EMTs with the FDNY while also attracting new members, there must be a sizable investment from the city that demonstrates a true financial commitment to this department.

The lack of resources and an alarming trend of surging assaults is causing members to leave the Department even faster to find work that is safer and more lucrative. The brain drain is abysmal — 30% resign after 3 years and 50% resign after 5 years.

The FDNY EMS System is absolutely and totally broken, and sadly this emanates from City Hall. After decades of false promises, deferred maintenance, and proposals punted into to future administrations, not much has changed. Despite our pleading and desperation for help, the FDNY simply does not see the importance of our services.

We are sick of the speeches, sick of the posturing. Let's all agree: The system is horribly broken.

The dedicated women and men of EMS – and the citizens we are sworn to protect – absolutely deserve better attention and protection.

**Thank You all for your time and consideration.**



April 15, 2024

## **CHIP Testimony on FDNY Equipment**

Thank you for holding this hearing today. I am Adam Roberts, Policy Director for the Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP). We represent New York's housing providers, including apartment building owners and managers.

We are here to express our concern about the lack of sufficient equipment for FDNY to fight fires in apartment buildings. In particular, it appears as though FDNY does not have the equipment necessary to combat the sharp rise in ebike fires.

Currently, when an illegal lithium battery is discovered in an apartment building, FDNY requires building staff to safely remove the battery. DEP then requires building owners to hire a third party service to dispose of the battery.

Building staff lack the equipment and expertise to handle the proper removal of lithium batteries. Even if they were to have better equipment and training, they lack the legal right to access an occupied apartment. Likewise, we have safety concerns about the city requiring that the disposal of such a deadly technology be outsourced.

The only explanation for such an illogical system of dealing with ebike fires is that FDNY lacks the equipment necessary to deal with them. We do not know what equipment is needed, though we have heard of many promising ideas. Nevertheless, it is clear that a well-equipped FDNY is in a better position to safely handle the removal and disposal of lithium batteries than building staff and third party disposal companies.

Furthermore, placing the onus on buildings to deal with ebike fires is a financial burden they cannot afford, particularly for rent-stabilized buildings. Net operating income (NOI), which is the amount of income a unit produces before debt service, is dropping dangerously fast throughout the city.

Therefore, owners cannot afford to bear the cleanup costs and rising insurance rates that come from dealing with ebike fires. In the Bronx, NOI for pre-1974 rent-stabilized buildings, those which do not receive 421a, dropped nearly 20% in one year.

FDNY has the training in dealing with ebike fires and the legal ability to access occupied apartments with lithium batteries. Therefore, we need the council to ensure FDNY has the necessary equipment to prevent these fires from proliferating.

Again, thank you for holding this hearing today.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Name: Chief Michael Meyers

Address: Chief of Safety Command

I represent: FDNY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Captain Michael Lee

Address: Head of Robotics

I represent: FDNY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Chief Daniel Murray

Address: Chief of Hazmat

I represent: FDNY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Chief Evan Suschecki

Address: Chief of Fleet

I represent: FDNY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Richard Nash

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: FUNY Hazmat

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Jim James Brosi

Address: 125 Madison Ave

I represent: UFA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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