



September 19, 2022

Testimony of Acting Commissioner Laura Kavanagh, FDNY
Evaluating Diversity & Inclusion in the FDNY

Good morning Chair Ariola and all Council Members present. My name is Laura Kavanagh and I am the Acting Commissioner of the New York City Fire Department. I am joined today by John Hodgens, Chief of Department for FDNY; Lizette Christoff, Deputy Commissioner for Budget and Finance and Acting First Deputy Commissioner; Nafeesah Noonan, Assistant Commissioner of Recruitment and Retention, and Don Nguyen, Assistant Commissioner for Equal Employment Opportunities. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Diversity and Inclusion.

The FDNY is a world class fire department. Our firefighters and EMS members are the best at what they do. We must apply that same drive and excellence to diversifying the department and ensuring that it is a safe and desirable place to serve for individuals of all backgrounds. This mission requires a proactive, aggressive approach. We have an enormous amount of work to do. But I am encouraged by the progress that has been made, and I am optimistic about the road ahead.

Our goal is to make the Fire Department reflect the city that it protects. In doing so, we must grapple with more than 157 years of history and tradition that has encouraged and cultivated white men to pursue this profession and in turn has created a culture that is tailored to and welcoming to them, to the exclusion of qualified diverse candidates.

The objective of recruiting in a modern firefighting environment is to maintain a shared sense of service and tradition while forming a 21st century fire department, with women and people of color making up significant portions of the workforce and featured prominently in positions of leadership.

Hiring more diverse firefighters is only part of the equation; it is imperative that the daily experience of every member of the department is positive and the comradery that is so appealing about the job includes everyone. We need to take active steps to ensure that FDNY workplaces are welcoming, and that firehouse culture encourages the teamwork and interconnectivity that is necessary in our work. This perspective on diversity and inclusion cannot be simply the result of the lawsuit that placed the Department under a court monitor in 2014. We must do it because it is the right thing to do, and it is how we can best serve the diverse neighborhoods of the city we live in.

Taking on this challenge requires a deliberate effort and a strategic approach. Under the previous administration, I was privileged to help plan and execute the Fire Department's recruitment campaign for the 2017 Firefighter exam, which yielded the most diverse candidate pool in department history. Roughly a decade ago FDNY firefighters were 93% white men. Today, that

number has dropped to 73%. Our current workforce includes 154 women firefighters, which is the highest number in any point in history and a tripling of the numbers since I joined the FDNY.

As Acting Commissioner, I have been able to make some discretionary appointments that further our diversity goals, serve as an inspiration for others, and change who has a seat at the table in the decision-making process – including some who are literally sitting with me today. Including:

- My executive officer, Tracy Lewis, is the first woman Fire Officer and the first Black Fire Officer to serve in that role for a Fire Commissioners
- DC Christoff is the first Latina women to serve in the role of First Deputy Commissioner
- Tonya Boyd is the first Black member of EMS to serve as Deputy Chief of EMS and Cheryl Middleton is the second
 - They are both the first Black women to serve as EMS Division Chiefs
- Chief Malcolm Moore is the first black chief of Special Operations and the first non-white chief to serve on the executive staff in more than a decade

There are also many other firsts that have been made as a result of the increase in the diversity in our current candidate pool, including:

- Joann Diaz is the first Latina to obtain the rank of Fire Lieutenant
- Michelle Fitzsimmons is the first openly gay Battalion Chief and the second woman to serve as Battalion Chief
- Jennifer Quinones is the first Latina and Asian woman to serve as a Fire Marshal
- Chinelle Thomas and Emanuela Rogers are the first women promoted to serve as Deputy Chief Inspectors in the Bureau of Fire Prevention
- Shana and Ashley Laroche are the first Black sisters to serve as Firefighters
- Kinga and Daiana Mielnik are the first sisters to serve as Fire Marshals (and Kinga was promoted recently to Lieutenant)

These are compelling personal achievements, but even more significantly, each of these members has broken through a gender or ethnicity-based ceiling – or in some cases multiple ceilings – paving the way for others to follow.

Recruitment & Retention

Many of the Fire Department's positive developments started with targeted recruitment and proactive efforts to retain candidates. In the two years prior to the 2017 Firefighter Civil Service Exam, the Department executed an aggressive campaign to increase the number of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and female firefighter candidates. The campaign employed a substantial toolbox of recruitment tactics, including a robust field campaign, thorough data collection and analysis, and a cutting-edge system of correspondence with candidates. We sought input from recruiting experts; we hired marketing and media specialists to design a targeted communications strategy that involved focus-group message testing with our target audience; we leveraged the Department's immense digital and social media presence; and we created modern print and video ads in subway stations, bus stops, billboards, fire houses, and any location we determined would be effective for attracting candidates.

The Department employed outreach coordinators to reach underrepresented groups. We developed partnerships with public and community-based institutions to host and participate in recruitment events on site and at FDNY facilities. This included organizations such as the New York Urban League, Make the Road New York, the LGBTQ Center, the Dominican Women’s Development Center, 100 Black Men, Nontraditional Employment for Women, the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, and many others.

The results were undeniable. For the first time in the history of the Department, more women and Black, Latino, and Asian applicants filed for the firefighter exam than white men. The number of Asian test takers increased by 55% from the previous cycle. The number of Black test takers increased by 39%. The number of Latino test takers increased by 29%. And the number of women test takers improved by 115% over the previous exam.

We also put an intense focus upon retaining candidates throughout the process, taking a set of deliberate steps to ensure that candidates received a consistent flow of information and were given frequent opportunities to engage with the recruitment process, including a variety of programs to prepare them for the written and physical portions of the process.

I’d like to highlight a few of those retention efforts here today:

- **FDNY Mobile Academy**
 - Mobile Academies, which are staged around the City, offer Firefighter candidates and the opportunity to participated in scaled version of the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT). The FDNY Fitness Unit and other uniformed firefighters are onhand to assess candidate fitness levels and answer questions during a Q&A session. Mobile Academies are designed to engage Firefighter candidates while they are waiting for their List number to be reached by DCAS.
- **Information Sessions at Probie School**
 - Once a candidate’s List number is reached, she is invited to attend information sessions at the Probationary Firefighter School. They are introduced to members of the Fitness Unit, are given a tour of the Fire Academy, and receive information about enrolling in the CPAT Prep Program.
- **CPAT Prep Program**
 - The CPAT Prep Program is an “invitation only” program available to Firefighter candidates whose List number has been reached by DCAS for processing. The program lasts 12 weeks during which each candidate receives instruction and hands-on training in order to master techniques and pass all eight evolutions of the CPAT exam. These evolutions include the Stair Climb, Hose Drag, Equipment Carry, Ladder Raise & Extension, Forcible Entry, Search, Rescue Drag, and Ceiling Breach & Pull. FDNY Fitness instructors work directly with Firefighter candidates throughout the duration of the program.
- **Firefighter Candidate Mentorship Program**

- The FCMP is a voluntary partnership designed to ensure that Firefighter candidates successfully complete the hiring process and become New York City Firefighters. Enrollment is available to candidates whose List number has been reached, and all candidates are encouraged to participate. Mentees (candidates) are paired with a uniformed Firefighter who serves as a Mentor. Mentors are in contact with Mentees on a bi-weekly basis, providing valuable information and resources for the Mentee about training and the hiring progress. Mentors provide guidance and serve as a positive role model, able to speak with experience about the challenges facing candidates and what it takes to overcome them. This partnership spans CPAT Prep and continues throughout a candidate's time at the Fire Academy.
- **Stairmaster Training Program**
 - One component of the Medical Exam that can challenge candidates is the Stairmaster element. The Department offers a Stairmaster Training Program to all Firefighter candidates who has passed their CPAT Exam and are preparing for the Medical Exam. Candidates are encouraged to continue the Stairmaster Training Program even after passing the Stairmaster portion of the exam, as it is helpful in maintaining their fitness while at the Fire Academy.
- **Fitness Awareness Program**
 - The Fitness Awareness Program occurs over a 12-week schedule and involves candidate training in four baseline evaluations: sit-ups, push-ups, pull-ups, and a timed run. This program is offered to candidates who have passed the CPAT exam. Fitness instructors put Firefighter candidates through the paces of a challenging sessions of calisthenics, enabling them to advance towards their fitness goals. Instructors teach techniques and help candidates reach a level of fitness so that they enter the Academy at a proper level of fitness right from the start.

Office of Diversity & Inclusion

Recruiting more diverse classes of firefighters is important, but it is also critical that we make sure that the working environment of the Fire Department is one in which diverse members of the Department can thrive. The position of Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer is a Deputy Commissioner-level position and reports directly to the Commissioner. That office has been held by an interim CDIO since it became vacant in Summer 2021 when the former CDIO took a position in the private sector. When I took on this role from former Commissioner Nigro, I began a search for our permanent CDIO and have selected a truly stellar candidate.

Within the CDIO office, the Department has instituted several programs and events aimed at creating a more inclusive environment. A key element of this is training, and the CDIO office has created and rolled out a large number of new trainings in recent years, including Unconscious Bias training; LGBTQ+ training; Structured Interview training to assist hiring managers about unconscious biases in hiring; Microaggressions; and Inclusive Leadership Training. We have also created a large number of events and celebrations to promote cultural awareness, including Hispanic Heritage Appreciation Month; Black History Month and Martin Luther King events; Women's History Month and awards; an Annual celebration of Asian American Pacific Islander

Celebration; Pride celebrations; and Hanukkah and Holocaust Remembrance commemorations, to name but a small number. The CDIO team along with my office meets regularly with Affiliated Organization leadership and corresponds to discuss concerns, ongoing initiatives, and to generate new ideas.

The team has also launched a monthly newsletter and consistently generates Diversity and Inclusion messaging to be included in other Department publications, including infographics and educational materials, and showcasing events and spaces wherein members may speak on inclusion, religious diversity, bias, and more. The CDIO office launched the “Courageous Conversations” program to discuss issues related to racial inclusion and equity, and the Bravest Women Talk monthly program.

COVID 19 disrupted some of the in-person practices of the unit, so the CDIO team visited firehouses and EMS stations, bringing snacks and cooking meals with members. They met with members at more than 300 facilities, including all Engine and Ladder companies, EMS stations, and Marine Units; the only facilities that they did not visit were experiencing COVID outbreaks.

EEO and Firehouse Climate

Over the past few years, the EEO office has undergone a significant overhaul including digitizing its system and cases so metrics can be tracked and analyzed; hiring additional staff to speed up investigations; developing early intervention programs via an EEO counselors’ program; increasing the use of alternative dispute methods such as mediation; and working to identify the sources of future issues by analyzing EEO data across the city.

Most importantly, the EEO office has dedicated itself to interacting with firehouses even after completing investigations, to ensure compliance, check in on progress, and to identify and remediate issues that, even if not substantiated under EEO laws, suggest significant climate issues exist within the firehouse.

The FDNY is also in the process of getting the results of a firehouse climate survey, that will be used as a benchmark to measure the climate of all houses going forward. This will also aide the work of the new CDIO whose expertise is in firehouse climate and diversity issues, and who can use this data to develop proactive solutions.

Finally, my administration is undergoing a full review of the disciplinary process and has already resolved a number of critical cases that had been drawn out for too long.

Legislation

I’m appreciative that the Council is interested in this issue and has developed legislation on this topic. The Fire Department is supportive of the bills that are at issue today, though we do have some comments about the feasibility of certain aspects.

Introduction 516: This bill, sponsored by Speaker Adams, would require the Fire Department to develop and implement a plan to ensure that the racial, ethnic, and gender demographics of the Department's firefighters reflect the City's population and post an annual report detailing the Department's efforts. This is something that we can do and in fact, we already produce an annual report with some of this information.

Introduction 519: This bill, sponsored by Chair Ariola, would require the Fire Department to, within one year, conduct a survey each firehouse to determine permanent facility upgrades necessary to bathrooms, bunkrooms, locker rooms, changing areas, and other areas. It would require the Department to submit a report on the findings of the survey and complete identified upgrades within five years. This is an issue upon which we are already keenly focused. Our Facilities team has a proactive approach to ensuring a safe environment for a mixed gender workforce, and not only do they plan and execute upgrades to specific sites that are in need of such improvement, they also plan ahead through a process called "Futurespecs" for needs that will surface in the future. Completing such a survey should be doable. However, I do want to note that, given the age of many firehouses, renovations of can be particularly expensive. The renovations we've already performed to address circulation issues have run up to \$10 million for an individual project. While we could comply with this bill by devising a plan to make changes to each firehouse, the cost and the nature of our 24/7 operations make it unlikely that it would be feasible for the Department to carry out upgrades at every house within five years. Perhaps a more flexible time period would make this more achievable.

Introduction 552: This bill, sponsored by Councilmember Riley, would require the Fire Department to produce an annual report on the gender and racial demographics of each firehouse and the gender and racial demographics individuals who reside within the geographic area that each firehouse covers. We can certainly produce a report on the composition of the firehouses. Unfortunately, the Fire Department does not track or record neighborhood demographic information; however, we are happy to explore with the Council ways to achieve that goal.

Introduction 553: This bill, sponsored by Councilmember Riley, would require the Fire Department to develop and implement a plan for providing ongoing training and education to all members and staff regarding harassment, diversity, and inclusion and to produce a report on this training annually. Under this legislation, annual training on harassment policies and diversity and inclusion would be required to be conducted in person. We have required annual training required already and we could increase annual training. One point of clarification, though, is that all training is costly because it requires backfilling shifts during training periods, and if the training is in-person, costs can balloon. It may be more economically feasible for the City to enable the Department to conduct these trainings virtually via our DiamondPlate platform, which is available in every firehouse.

Introduction 560: This bill, sponsored by Councilmember Williams, would require the Fire Department to report on the number and nature of Equal Employment Opportunity complaints and action taken by the Department. This is something that would be feasible for us.

Conclusion

Diversifying the Fire Department is a necessity. We are driven by a commitment to provide the best possible service to the people of New York, and we can only maximize our ability to serve when we maximize our workforce. That means building a department that reflects the city that we serve. It also means that our members share a sense of belonging and inclusion. We recognize that we still have a long road ahead. We are energized by recent successes, and we will use this momentum to continue moving forward. We thank the Council for its focus on this issue and we look forward to achieving progress together.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT
SEPTEMBER 19, 2022**

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Ariola and the members of the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management for holding this hearing.

The bills introduced today are a welcome addition to the fight to make the FDNY representative of New York City. Int 0516, Int 0519, Int 0552, and Int 0553 all provide the framework for building the material, as well as the database, necessary to make change. In the FDNY 2021 Demographics Report, 65 women and 1,758 men graduated from probationary firefighter school¹. The numbers today are less than when women first entered the FDNY nearly 40 years ago pursuant to a successful gender based discrimination lawsuit in 1982². Furthermore, the 2014 court case United States of America and Vulcan Society, Inc. v. City of New York awarded \$98 million for Black and Latino victims of discrimination³. Yet, even with a federal monitor for diversity and past lawsuits, there have recently been racist incidents against black firefighters⁴. The numbers make it clear that when it comes to women and people of color, New York City can, should and must do better.

However, I have some concerns as to the execution of the bills. EMS is one of the most diverse agencies in the City of New York, as 59% of the EMS workforce are people of color, while 77% of New York City firefighters are white. While salaries for firefighters are extremely competitive, EMS staff are underpaid and overworked. Thus, the majority black and brown employees inside the FDNY are receiving disparate salaries in comparison to their white counterparts. In our discussion for diversity we must also include fair pay for black and brown workers. We fundamentally must reform the FDNY, so that EMS workers are being paid a family-sustaining wage and to close the racial pay gap.

Additionally, we must be conscious of the systems already in place, and look to improve the current diversity infrastructure before investing in alternative recruitment methods. The FDNY High School, developed in partnership with the DOE in 2005, was created to be a pipeline for black and brown students into the FDNY. However, FDNY High school has systematically failed to fulfill its goal to diversify the firefighting force. The FDNY High School is over 90% Black and Latino, and, over the course of its 10

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/fdny/downloads/pdf/about/fdny-demographics-5-4-2022.pdf>

² Berkman v. City of New York, 536 F. Supp. 177, 183 (E.D.N.Y. 1982)

³ <https://ccrjustice.org/home/what-we-do/our-cases/united-states-america-and-vulcan-society-inc-v-city-new-york>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/01/nyregion/fdny-racism-scandal.html>



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

years, has graduated hundreds of students⁵. The Economic Needs index is 10% higher than the city average, as 83% of students in FDNY High School have great economic needs⁶. **It is important to note that only two former students are currently firefighters⁷.**

If 75% of students are graduating FDNY High School, what more should be done to prepare students for applying to become firefighters? After applying to become a firefighter, how many female students and students of color have received a callback from the FDNY? These are the questions that we must have answers to, and if answered can greatly improve diversity in the FDNY.

The FDNY now requires diversity counselors because their past attempts to diversity have failed. New York City must focus on improving current diversity methods, in addition to the legislation before us today. If we do not address the already existing problems in diversity recruitment, then the most recent attempt may fail as well.

⁵ <https://tools.nycenet.edu/snapshot/2021/19K502/HS/>

⁶ See footnote 5

⁷ <https://www.fdneyfoundation.org/fdny-foundation-celebrates-10th-graduating-class-of-the-capt-vernon-arichard-high-school-for-fire-and-life-safety/>

Regina Wilson's testimony for the Fire and Emergency management hearing on September 19th 2022.

Good morning, Council members. My name is Regina Wilson, and I am the past President of the Vulcan Society, an affinity organization of African American Uniformed and Civilian employees of the FDNY and a 23-year veteran of the Department. I want to thank you all for your time and the opportunity to come before you today to discuss and support the five pieces of legislation regarding evaluating Diversity and inclusion in the FDNY. Many years ago, the Vulcan Society met with the legislative office of Speaker Corey Johnson to discuss hardships members of the department were experiencing on a consistent basis dealing with discrimination, harassment, racism, and sexism in the FDNY. Members are still experiencing racist material on their lockers, transfer papers left on their lockers designed to make them feel unwelcome in their firehouse, tampering with food and gear, racist memes shared out via firehouse group chats, sexual assault of male and female members, egregious hazing and bullying. When the Vulcan Society is made aware of these issues, we send our members to the EEO office within the FDNY. Yet over the years we heard from many members that they were displeased with the office's work. Members waited several weeks to hear back from EEO Officers and waited many months to find out that the harm they reported and received was found to be unsubstantiated. The Vulcan Society addressed these matters with the EEO office and pushed the office to align its work with the City's EEO goal: to reach case determinations within 90 days. Unfortunately, the EEO office recently reported to the Court that it is grossly understaffed and 65% of their cases are open for over 90 days.

One member has not heard from the EEO office in 6 months and their case remains unresolved. This failure in the system has caused great harm to the member who once again have lost faith in the EEO office and the ability to resolve cases efficiently. Many members use the EEO office as an internal check box but seek justice outside the walls of the FDNY. Many members have expressed frustration regarding cases found unsubstantiated by EEO because the EEO officer could not identify the person or persons who committed the violation. But many times evidence provided prove that something did occur and there was indeed a violation to the EEO policy. The office has indicated that it now substantiates these cases but indicates that the bad actor could not be identified. Unfortunately, the EEO Office rarely takes measures to correct the behavior in the firehouse leaving the act unpunished making it destined to happen again. These behaviors across the department create a hostile work environment which has caused many members to not want to come to work, take full time details outside of their firehouse to escape the trauma, turn to drugs and alcohol and many times suffer in silence. These behaviors are embedded into the culture and part of the system of the FDNY. For these reasons, the Vulcan Society held a meeting, and its members took a vote of no confidence of the EEO office and the Bureau of Trails and Investigations.

The introduction to the toxic FDNY culture begins with probationary firefighter school. Instructors tell Probationary Firefighters that they must assimilate. They try to strip probies down from who they are as a person, how they think and believe to accepting abuse, bullying and hazing as a normal part of the job. The cruelty is not foreign to those who perform the act because they themselves have experienced it in one form or another. They have just been so brainwashed to believing that tearing each other down is a part of the job. Training people to think as a team and not as an individual to be a firefighter need not come with a cost of giving up your identity as a person, dignity and self-respect. No job deserves to take that away from you.

Being a woman or a person of color in the FDNY can be one of the hardest things you may experience. Not only are you entering a department that historically has not welcomed people of color but by the very design of firehouses, never welcomed women. These are a few examples:

- The firehouses did not have bathrooms in every firehouse until 2016 after years of the UFW battling with the department regarding bathroom. The first female firefighters entered the firehouses in 1982. This year on the 25th of September will mark the 40th anniversary since the first women entered the FDNY.
- Most bathrooms are not designed to accommodate more than one woman.
- Designated bathroom keys are given to female members of the FDNY and company offices for access to the bathroom. Often the keys given to the Officers are not secured. I was once walk in on by a male firefighter
- Many firehouses have open locker rooms where female and civilian may see male firefighters changing their clothes.
- Female bathrooms in firehouses with no female firefighter assigned to them – even though female firefighters may be detailed to that firehouse at anytime -
- are often converted into storage spaces or used in other ways to comfort the male firefighters in the firehouse.
- Bunkrooms are open space and do not have sections of privacy, I no longer rest in the bunker room after I witness a male firefighter putting his pants back on after taking them off to lay in the bed.

Former Commissioner Nigro once stated that the FDNY should have a goal and department of 15% women to which I totally agree. But since that statement until present, the FDNY has not created a plan to achieve those numbers or an exclusive plan for recruitment and retention for women. The FDNY must still work hard to create an atmosphere of acceptance for women candidates and firefighters that is free of bullying, sexual harassment and hazing.

Regarding the Chief Diversity and Inclusion office. This position was created as part of the Vulcan Society settlement with the City. The position has yet to reach its true potential to change the dynamics of the FDNY. The last two CDIOs failed in their jobs. The position is currently vacant and the unit today has not been making a significant contribution to making the FDNY a more inclusive working environment. The unit has not dealt with the systemic racism of the department or addressed any of the women's issues stated previously in my statement. No department wide plan or true measure with metrics of success to achieve diversity and inclusion has been produced. We need an overhaul of this unit's practices and a new direction for the office that adopts goals and sets expectations. This position has been vacant for 14 months leaving the department again without the work of an essential position and function. The department has onboarded someone to start at the end of the year and setting goals and expectations so that this office can finally realize its potential is essential.

In conclusion. I've been with the FDNY for 23 years and I have watched so many members struggle to maneuver their way through the FDNY system. When will the day come when we will not have to battle for basic rights and treatment in the workplace. When will people of color, women and the citizen of New York be afforded the same opportunities as others. If you look at the history of the FDNY, it has never been a willing organization of inclusion for anyone other than white males. The changes in the department have primarily come due to lawsuits where discrimination was at the very heart of the exclusion. To change the FDNY we need strong leadership committed to making systemic overhaul. During the last administration the Vulcan Society and the United Women Firefighter Association met with many members of executive staff from the Commissioner, 1st Deputy Commissioner, Legal, the Bureau of Trails and investigation, EEO and others. Progress was made but not enough to change the very nature of the deep-rooted issues which plaque the department. Some have blamed the former Commissioner Nigro from preventing members from the executive staff from making the necessary changes to the department. They saw the issues the department was plagued with but felt unheard, ignored or silenced. To them I say, look at the brave people testifying here today. They give all of themselves today even with fear of retaliation looming over their heads. They come to tell their truth and advocate for change. They speak on what is wrong with this department and seek the necessary help of the City Council to fix it. I say to them, you should have done the same. For all the political clout and influences afforded to FDNY leadership, you should have been just as brave as these members and should have taken a stand for what is right.

To them I say: Your silence makes you complicit to all the of bad behavior. I say you cannot separate yourself from any of it. But I also say, it is not too late to step up and do what's right and join the Vulcan Society and City Council in ensuring the FDNY's future is inclusive. I urge them to begin today and I encourage Council to pass this package of legislation that will help to hold the department accountable for this change with stronger amendment of accountability added.

Thank you all for you time

Regina Wilson

September 19, 2022

**Testimony of Arlene Simmons, Deputy Chief
Member, EMS Superior Officers Associations
Committee on Fire and Emergency Management
'Evaluating Diversity and Inclusion in the FDNY'**

Good afternoon. My name is Arlene Simmons.

I have been an EMS First Responder for the City of New York since 1993. I currently serve as a Deputy Chief in the EMS Bureau of the New York City Fire Department.

From July of 2016 to August of 2018 I was assigned to the Office of Recruitment and Retention for the FDNY. The Office of Recruitment and Retention is an integrated unit that recruits both EMS First Responders and Firefighters together.

Our recruitment efforts included tabling and other outreach efforts that targeted women and communities of color. We were instructed to staff these tables with FDNY representatives who were women and people of color to portray a sense of diversity in the Department. Our primary duty in these recruitment efforts was to get as many people, specifically women and people of color, to fill out Expressions Of Interest, or "EOI"s.

EOIs are forms people fill out to express an interest in applying to the Department either for the EMS side or the Fire side, after which the Department is supposed to follow up to help these individuals apply for the position they are interested in.

Most of the people who came to our tables were interested in the firefighter position in large part because of the substantial difference in pay and benefits between EMS First Responders and Firefighters.

We were specifically instructed to have the people we targeted for recruitment fill out EOIs for *both* EMS and Fire. In other words, we were told to encourage the mostly women and people of color who engaged with us and expressed an interest in becoming a Firefighter to also fill out an EOI expressing an interest in working in EMS, even when they did not have that interest. We were told to advise them that this helped provide more opportunities to become a Firefighter, and that they should keep their options open.

After both EOIs were filled out, non-white and female applicants were then encouraged to apply for EMS because they were told that there is not as long a waiting list on the test like fire, that it is easier to get in, and that

they could start on the EMS side which was easier to get into and then transfer to the fire side later, which then rarely happens.

I also want to briefly respond to is the administration's statements regarding the outreach they do in high schools as a recruitment tool for firefighters. In fact, these high school recruitment efforts also do not result in diversification in a meaningful way. As an initial matter firefighters have an age requirement of 21 so most high school graduates will not meet that requirement to even apply for a firefighter for many years after graduation. Like the other recruitment, these diverse high school graduates are more regularly encouraged to enter the FDNY as an EMS with promises that they can be a firefighter at a later time.

As a result, the process that was supposed to track and support recruitment to diversify the FDNY by bringing in more diversity into the almost exclusively white and male side of the department has the actual effect of funneling women and people of color into the EMS side so that the Department continues to be segregated with almost exclusively white men being let into the Fire side and almost all women and non-white applicants who matriculate into the FDNY being hired on the EMS side.

In the decades I have worked as an EMS First Responder in the FDNY the exclusionary and discriminatory culture that permeates the FDNY has not gotten better. It persists and in fact finds way to circumvent efforts like the recruitment initiative I just described, to maintain the status quo. There is a predominately white and male side of the Department that is respected valued and resourced, and another side that is predominately women and people of color that is undervalued, underpaid and subjected to unfair working conditions. These first responders show up to the same emergencies and have the same risks on the job. But we are treated completely differently by our employer. It is my opinion, based on decades of first-hand experience as well as my experience working directly in the FDNY's Office of Recruitment and Retention that as long as the Department is allowed to continue a policy where it values the fire side but does not value the EMS side there will continue to be serious problems with diversity and equal employment opportunity in the Department. Lastly it is my opinion that this change will not come from within the Department despite the efforts they represent they are taking as illustrated with their recruitment efforts.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to speak.

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September 19, 2022

**Testimony of Michael Greco, Vice President Local 2507
FDNY EMS Uniformed EMT's Paramedics and Fire Inspectors
Committee on Fire and Emergency Management
'Evaluating Diversity and Inclusion in the FDNY'**

Good afternoon, my name is Mike Greco, and I am the Vice President of Local 2507 representing EMTs Paramedics and Fire Inspectors serving in the FDNY.

I want to pick up from where our President Mr. Barzilay left off to reiterate that Local 2507 supports the proposed bills discussed today and also asks this committee to consider seriously how pay inequity directly impacts the effort to diversify the FDNY.

Year after year the Department appears before this body trying to convince it that hiring 70 women is a big step forward in a workforce of almost 11,000. If we accept the argument that the Department increases diversity by 1% every year, it will be half a century before the problem has been corrected. It has already been more than two decades.

It was 2002 when the Vulcan Society filed its landmark EEOC complaint against the Department alleging discriminatory hiring practices. That matter is still pending today. Less than a year ago the then-Commissioner Nigro was ordered to appear before the Court because of the Department's continued discriminatory employment practices.

In 2019 the unions representing all FDNY's EMS first responders filed an EEOC complaint alleging discriminatory pay practices.

More than 10 years ago the Court ordered a federal monitor assigned to the FDNY because the Department was intentionally discriminating in its hiring practices. That monitor is still overseeing the Department today.

The Department claims it is moving in the right direction. But if we look closer, we see the opposite. The increase in diversity that the Department has touted today on the fire side is smaller than the overall increase in diversity in the City's workforce. In other words, they are not even maintaining the status quo. The Department wants us to scratch our heads and resign ourselves to the idea that it's just difficult to diversify. It should not be this difficult. This is not a problem of recruitment, it is a problem of intention. As the federal court found, the Department is intentionally discriminating in its hiring practices.

Thanks to the work done by the Court, the federal monitor and others, women and people of color are coming into the Department. While the department offers these new statistics to claim the problem is going away, it isn't. Because a new problem has emerged. A segregated workforce of first responders in the FDNY. These recruits are not given the opportunity to work as firefighters but instead are funneled to the EMS side where they are severely underpaid and undervalued, allowing the Department to continue its practice of exclusion. The only way to remedy this is to remove the disparate treatment between what is now two classes of first responders. Making it equally prestigious and financially beneficial to work as an FDNY first responder regardless of which Bureau will remove the motivation that causes the disparity in demographics. Remove the ability to relegate women and people of color to a lesser paid position and you remove the impetus for exclusionary practices.

I thank you for your time and commitment to this important work.

##



September 19, 2022

Testimony of Oren Barzilay, President Local 2507

FDNY EMS Uniformed EMT's Paramedics and Fire Inspectors

Committee on Fire and Emergency Management

'Evaluating Diversity and Inclusion in the FDNY'

Hello, my name is Oren Barzilay. I am the President of Local 2507 representing over 4,000 Uniform EMTs Paramedics and Fire Inspectors serving in the FDNY.

I want to first thank the Speaker for her long commitment on this issue, as well as the Chair of the Committee on Emergency and Fire Management.

Local 2507 supports the proposed bills discussed today. They will provide important data to help hold the Department accountable.

But to solve the problem with lack of diversity in the FDNY, we must end the practice of disparate compensation for FDNY's first responders.

Some may say pay equity is a different issue, but it's not. It is central to the issue of diversity in the FDNY because as long as there is a system of "haves" and "have-nots" those who "have" will work to maintain that status quo.

To understand the problem, we can't just look at the demographics of firefighters. We must also look at the demographics of EMS and the way the Department treats these first responders disparately as to compensation and prestige, despite being an integrated Department.

Today the challenge is no longer just the discriminatory barriers to entering the Department. While that still exists, as the statistics show, more diverse recruits are entering the FDNY. The problem is that they are only allowed on the EMS side where they are paid significantly less, allowing the Department to continue its practice of exclusion.

Since 1996 the FDNY has operated as an integrated department dispatching firefighters and EMS to the same emergencies. Despite responding to the same emergencies, facing similar risks on the job, and respectfully handling 90% of the 911 calls, EMS is given only 14% of the budget, and paid a fraction of the salary of our colleagues on the fire side. This in no way means our brothers and sisters on the fire side should not be compensated as they are, and we highly respect their heroic work. What this does mean however is by letting women and people of color into the Department but only placing them on the EMS side while greatly reducing pay and benefits for that side, the Department is able to claim they are diversifying the Department, while perpetuating the underlying problem which is the lack of equal employment opportunity.

It is no wonder that even with Court oversight, the Department has been unable to diversify the Department despite its recruitment efforts. As you will hear from Deputy Chief Simmons, the recruitment efforts focusing on diversity, some of which have been discussed today, do not actually achieve those results.

In order to solve the problem with diversity we have to stop the Department from segregating its first responders by removing the extreme difference in pay, benefits and resources. This will remove the incentive and motivation to exclude women and people of color from one side of the Department and funnel them to the other. It is also the right thing to do.

Thank you again for all of your work on this issue.

##

**Testimony of FDNY Capt.(ret.) Brenda Berkman before the New York City Council Committee on Fire & Emergency Management, September 19, 2022
Re: "Oversight: Evaluating Diversity and Inclusion in the FDNY;"
"Int. No. 516, in relation to demographic diversity within the Fire Department;" "Int. No. 519, in relation to requiring permanent firehouse facility upgrades to ensure a safe working environment for a mixed gender workforce;" "Int. No. 552, in relation to reporting demographic information of members of the Fire Department at firehouses;" "Int. No. 553, in relation to requiring the Fire Department to implement training on diversity, inclusion, and harassment;" "Int. No. 560, in relation to requiring the Fire Department to annually report on equal employment opportunity complaints."**

Good morning and thank you for allowing me to submit testimony today. My name is Brenda Berkman. I was the sole named class plaintiff in my successful sex discrimination lawsuit *Berkman v. Koch* which 40 years ago resulted in the hiring in September 1982 of the first (41) women FDNY firefighters, including myself. Despite significant harassment including physical assault, death threats and tampering with my protective gear, I rose to the rank of Captain and served the City of New York for 25 years. I was the founder and President of the United Women Firefighters Association (NYC) as well as President of the international organization for women firefighters Women in the Fire Service. In addition to my law degree from NYU, I have a MS in Protection Management from John Jay and a Chief Fire Officer certification from the National Fire Academy. Among the honors I have received have been my selection as the first professional firefighter to be chosen as a White House Fellow and selection as a Revson Fellow on the Future of New York. I have forty years of experience and advocacy on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion and I am a subject matter expert in this field.

As a firefighter and fire officer, my assignments included being an instructor for FDNY sexual harassment training (called by many names) and working for the FDNY Chief of Safety where I organized strategic planning and a study of FDNY Line of Duty deaths. I also assisted with obtaining the first funding from the NY Women's Foundation for UWF training for women FDNY firefighter candidates. In retirement from the FDNY, I continue to be actively involved in FDNY gender and racial disparity issues.

If you do not know the history of misogyny, harassment, sexism, racism and lack of opportunity experienced by the first group of FDNY firefighters, please be assured that the legacy of that discrimination (and that experienced by earlier men of color) continues in today's FDNY. Illegal, cruel and immoral behavior has been and continues to be normalized and ignored -- women were and are just expected to put up with it. If we complain, we were and are retaliated against, and the perpetrators are rarely punished. Some of the very men who were bad actors as younger firefighters have been promoted and put in positions of authority in the FDNY today.

My first testimony regarding the lack of gender equity in the FDNY occurred in 1982-83 before the late Councilwoman Miriam Friedlander's Women's Committee. And I have continued to regularly testify before the Council on FDNY women's issues ever since – 40 years. Consistently I have called for much more serious oversight of the FDNY by the NYC Council regarding gender and racial disparities. It is not enough to have laws and regulations on the books or flowery proposals by the FDNY – these are just empty words on a page unless the Council demands transparency and truth in reporting and holds the agency accountable for its failure to dramatically improve its treatment of women firefighters. With every change in administration, the women firefighters and women's advocates have offered concrete suggestions for improvement to the City and the FDNY. Sometimes a suggestion might be adopted briefly (e.g., the cadet program) but then dropped – even when shown to have promise for improving gender equity. Other times, good suggestions (often based on other programs around the US) are simply ignored. Even when some improvements are made (e.g. training protocols at the Fire Academy), some gains for women and people of color are immediately attacked and even rolled back.

I stand in awe today of the bravery of these active-duty firefighters who are willing to tell the truth about the FDNY. I know and they know they testify at great risk of retaliation.

These legislative proposals are good first steps for the Council and New Yorkers to learn about the true situation re gender and racial disparities in the FDNY. All of the FDNY and the communities they serve – women and men alike – will benefit from a more diverse and equitable Fire Department. The Council will need to

closely monitor the compliance of the FDNY with this legislation and hold leadership accountable for failures. Having 138 women out of 11,000 firefighters – 115 of which have been hired in the last 9 years which, although an improvement from many years of zero women hired, is still less than 13 women per year – is hardly a situation our City can accept in 2022.

I would be happy to work with the Council along with my active-duty sister firefighters to make this legislation strong and effective. Thank you for your attention to my testimony. Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Hello, my name is Corey David Boykins and I joined the FDNY November 2019.

What I can say is I am a direct product of the outreach the department has accomplished as I come from retail, have no family within the department, discovered the job through recruitment tables set up in Burroughs with a high demographic of color. I utilized every preparation course both academic and physical to prepare for the job and assumed that would be make me a great firefighter.

I can stand here and say I love the job, but the culture does need a lot of work, especially in means of diversity and inclusion.

I am an openly gay, black male, and my experience with the culture of the FDNY was extremely harmful towards both my mental and physical health. There was no preparation in regards to entering the department as a gay, male of color

The first comment I received entering my first firehouse from proby school was and I quote, "I do not think they should be dumbing the test down because you are black."

I was "Too happy, to soft, to fem, not a real man, mentally ill, along with other derogatory terms" and expected to feel comfortable and do my job. When I reached out for help I was told, "To butch it up, don't be too gay, etc..."

When you try to reach out for help you are also punished by the department and it's higher ups. As for example when EEO found a Lt guilty of creating a hostile work environment due to my sexual orientation, the department attempted to "Cover it up," yet I was made to feel I did something wrong.

I heard that the appointed officer (Chief Diversity Officer) of diversity and inclusion wasn't able to testify here today, and I personally feel that needs more clarification. When I reached out to the previously appointed diversity and inclusion officer as a "Probie" about the discrimination and hostility I was facing... He told me gay people do not belong on the department, my sexuality was my choice and I can change for the better and even suggested I sleep with women and will get treated better by the men at the firehouse, he attempted to call my firehouse to tell them I was here reporting them, attempted to call me into a private meeting with a chief without representation and that is just a few things.

When reported to EEO, I requested a move to another Burrough the cheif of operations declined because a precedent cannot be set for me, despite my desire to want to feel safe and comfortable at work... Yet the officer of D&V kept his title...

You become "That guy" when you try to report and change things for the better because the old school "culture and traditions" is what is celebrated... That must change

Even now... Speaking here will almost surely result in some form of backlash

From: Willoughby Avenue Neighbors United <willoughbyaveneighborsunited@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 18, 2022 9:41 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fire and Emergency Management - Open Streets and E-bikes

Dear City Council,

I am unable to attend the City Council Fire and Emergency Management meeting of Sept.19, 2022 but would like my views to be considered.

The Open Streets program, begun because of the Covid pandemic and now permanent throughout the city, hinders FDNY, EMS, and NYPD response time. Just this past week, on three separate occasions, fire trucks and ambulances were delayed on 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens. This is a 26 block long Open Street that is closed to vehicles including emergency vehicles. There are bollards and planters blocking access. Please see links. These closed streets are a tragedy waiting to happen. Imagine if it was your loved one waiting for EMS to arrive.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp35_Hf8VxE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGfzG1PseP4>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTbc_yJiu90

A few months ago, in the 88th police precinct two community officers were chasing a suspect. The suspect turned down the Willoughby Ave Open Street in Fort Greene/ Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. By the time the officers detoured around, the suspect was gone. The suspect went on to commit two felony assaults that night. (This is just one incident that I know about.) At a precinct meeting I asked the commanding officer, Deputy Inspector Ryon N. Malcolm, if the NYPD or the 88th had an official position on Open Streets. He replied they did not but that the previous administration asked if he would support an Open Street on Willoughby Ave. He answered NO he would not. The Department of Transportation disregarded his valuable opinion.

While cars, delivery trucks, and emergency vehicles are forced to detour around Open Streets more congestion occurs on surrounding streets.

My second concern is e-bikes. They are rampant throughout the city and often stored in apartments. That the batteries catch fire has been reported many times. Our city, in its effort to lessen the use of private cars, has encouraged the use of e-bikes. There is no oversight and again the general public is at grave risk. Many people who use e-bikes live in poorer neighborhoods. Once again people who are at risk are now living in an even more dangerous situation.

I ask you to please listen to the residents who are immediately impacted by these 2 issues and not just people, often not from the affected neighborhoods, who push to change our neighborhoods to their own agendas. Our tax dollars are being wasted on short-sighted and dangerous programs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Maria Ferrari

maria.v.ferrari@gmail.com

Brooklyn NY

From: Louis Holmes <holmes1985@icloud.com>

Sent: Monday, September 19, 2022 2:57 PM

Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Mon, Sep 19 @ 11:00 AM - Committee on Fire and Emergency Management

Good Afternoon,

As I mentioned in my in person testimony, white supremacy is very much present within the FDNY. Members are becoming more and more radicalized within the fire station. It needs to be addressed now, this is what leads to domestic terrorism. Also, FDNY need to ban and start testing members for steroid use as it cause me members to rage within the workplace.

Respectfully,
Louis Holmes



FDNY
March 15, 1997

DCN: 4.03.09

T.B. MANAGEMENT
SUPERVISION

3.9 TEAM BUILDING

Motivation in firefighting is largely a matter of team building. Team building encounters special problems when the team has to readjust to new members, minorities or females, or members who are problems because they do not behave as the team expects. In all kinds of hazardous work, teams tend to a high degree of stability. Members do not change often. Members develop common attitudes, interests and opinions. New members must usually adapt to "the team mind" before they are made to feel fully welcome. People who do not adapt become problem members. The adaptations required of new members who come from a very different background or have a very different set of interests or attitudes are far greater than the adaptations required of new members from the same general background as old members. Teams fight to maintain "the team personality", hence the adaptation problems when new members are quite different in personality.

1:35



NYC BS/CHAT



Volly Chief Tommy Gavin
U right



Not Tom has joined the group



Chris Barrett
What's up y'all



Central for TIME Person of the Year Award
they throwing molotovs now



Central for TIME Person of the Year Award



Ernie couldn't be more excited for his first day as a police officer. He outright refused to accept his paycheck, insisting that being able to legally shoot black children is payment enough.

1:08 AM



The Responder



Send Message...





NYC BS/CHAT



Trump 2020
I'll just gamble



Bull 🐮💩
Hose em down



Trump 2020
Agreed.



ogie oglethorpe
I'll never understand why people who live in projects would want to stay there. And not try and grab and education or city job and make something of their lives



HEY HI HELLO
Why do more when you can do less



Bull 🐮💩
Exactly ^



Scott S.
Wild animals like water so it really wouldn't help to hose them down... besides some might come out with soap and shampoo



Bull 🐮💩
Hand em everything



Bull 🐮💩
Wild animals behave better



Scott S.



Send Message...





Central for TIME Person of the Year Award



When you see a funny meme



Volly Chief Tommy Gavin
Oh fuck thats amazinf



Central for TIME Person of the Year Award
i have more my guy @Volly Chief Tommy Gavin



BLUE LINE
@Samantha Carmen I am going to sleep.
Make sure the boys are respectful



Damatzobox
GroupMe: Lee 623 has joined the group.



Send Message





NYC BS/CHAT



Central for TIME Person of the Year Award



Grover displays what he thinks are "acceptable" skin colours



HEY HI HELLO

I love the first unmarked



MF

Now now. They were helping him socially distance.



Bull 🐮💩
Hmmm



Volly Chief Tommy Gavin

I wish he was going faster so u can hear the
thu



59 new messages



Send Message





Central for TIME Person of the Year Award



Lance Lustig



The admins approve **@Central for TIME Person of the Year Award**



Volly Chief Tommy Gavin



@Samantha Carmen u csn do anything u want



Volly Chief Tommy Gavin



Sorry im tired I need help



Samantha Carmen



@Volly Chief Tommy Gavin As long as you put your head to it

39 new messages



Send Message





TD

Tommy Doherty





From: Nefati Fela <normanshepherd3@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2022 3:15 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Committee on Fire & Emergency Management

Good Morning Council,

I am Firefighter Norman Shepherd III of L 158 and this is my testimony regarding the matter of Evaluating Diversity and Inclusion in the FDNY. I've now been in the ranks of Firefighter for 7 years, prior to this I've worked in banking for about the same amount of time. It was very noticeable in the fire academy and after assignment that the lack of diversity in these ranks is not representative of the largest melting pot in the world, New York City. With that said, it also became clear that many of my non person of color colleagues had either lineage or groups of friends in the FDNY already. Therefore giving them an inside track as to what they may know about the job and the many nuances. For example ;how long the application process is, what age to start application for the job and possibly taking the back door in for non city residents via EMS promotional exam. Also it gave these members the inside track to where they'd like to be assigned as well.

Even more troubling than the previously mentioned nepotism. I was in the first academy class of 2015 with an African American Firefighter who was being called Kool-Aide. After hearing it for months I spoke to said Firefighter about why his white squadmates gave him that nickname and it was confirmed to be a racial epithet.

As for my experience at that juncture (FDNY Academy) on two separate occasions when I and a few other African Americans were seen talking in a small group a white colleague said "What is this a Vulcan meeting" referencing the Black affinity group in the FDNY. Outside of standing up for myself in those instances where multiple staff could hear, not a word was said to those people in either instance. So I took the opportunity to respond to their suggestion that it's not okay for groups of p.o.c (people of color) to speak to one another, as intelligently as possible. More recently it was suggested at roll call during a hot summer morning that the department issued black dri fit shirt turned black due to my sweat. The suggestion of my melanin bleeding through my shirt happened while I was surrounded by White members of the company, officer included and one other Black firefighter who is still on probation.

At the time there was a pending EEO case happening within our house citing discrimination, forgery and character assassination. Which numerous Black Firefighters were being targeted by White officers in the house and nothing was coming of it. While I did not file an EEO complaint because it's preached to handle things like this in house. I did tell that member who is senior to me how much that hurt. His response was who's going to testify that I said that. Funny enough when I was asked to testify on the behalf of these members in the former of this paragraph. One of the named officers in the EEO case had a friend who was there supposedly to look out for my best interest.

In closing, my aforementioned paragraphs are clear examples of nepotism and racism that unfortunately are staples in the history of this department. What kind of environment allows for such things? Why do non people of color feel so comfortable to spew racial epithets in department settings, even from the academy. When I think of the chance of this kind of behavior being okay in my previous career of banking, it's slim to none. How is it possible that private industry takes the protection of racial inclusion and diversity more seriously than the most sought after civil service entity. If change is to happen we need a recruitment push in the City University system and job fairs specific to the age groups sought after. Lastly a restructuring of EEO has to happen.

Good afternoon. My name is Sophy Medina. I'm a firefighter who's been forced on leave without pay as a result of standing up for myself when it comes to medical freedom, informed consent, and religious liberty.

As you may all be well aware, there is no state of emergency. Just this week the president of the United States affirmed what many of us have already known since "2 weeks to flatten the curve". The perspective of the firefighter, and EMS worker who were boots on the ground should not have been ignored. There was good reason why the uniformed members of the FDNY had low "compliance" numbers compared to other agencies, until a mandate was forced on them and they were given an ultimatum to either take a shot or lose their livelihoods. Our perspective was different from those who got to stay at home while we were out helping the residents of NYC. What we saw shaped our decisions. What we saw was what the mainstream news is now catching up to. The people who were dying of this virus were our elderly and people who had 4 or more comorbidities. The fire department members are primarily young and physically fit. We made our choice based on facts and not on fear and propaganda; hence, many firefighters didn't comply at first and submitted religious or medical exemptions. As you know the City's EEO Policy prohibits adverse employment actions based on a person's religion. This includes discriminatory practices and decisions, harassment, hostility or other adverse actions because of a person's creed, religious affiliation, or religious beliefs, observances or practices. Yet, here I am: harassed, excluded and unpaid because I exercised my rights. Here I am with not only my religious exemption being denied, but also my request for a medical exemption is has not been addressed for well over a month. The EEO office has violated its own policy by sitting on these exemptions and harassing the members or their doctors after the requests have been submitted. They have also ignored countless emails sent to them.

Never before has there been a deadline in place of when one could submit a request for a religious or medical exemption, yet one was arbitrarily placed in order to coerce members to comply with the mandate solely by getting the shot and not by actually allowing for any religious exemptions being granted.

The FDNY states that they want diversion and inclusion, but does not seem to want any dissenting thought and has gone out of its way to exclude the unvaccinated members, while also violating our rights to medical privacy by implementing policies that highlight an unvaccinated members status as unvaccinated and forcing people to publicly reveal their vaccination status. The deeply religious and spiritual members have also been targeted and many have been expelled after their exemptions were denied and they were either terminated or placed on leave without pay.

On the subject of recruitment, I was a trained recruiter by the FDNY and I was utilized by the department because of the fact that I fit many demographics: woman, POC, military veteran, mother. Where is the outrage by this city council, aside from the members who have spoken out for us, when the department pushes me out, or worse, forces me to give up the choices for my own body? When will the full city council get on the right side of history and end these mandates and bring back the members who have had their rights violated and make them whole again?

My name is William L West. I'm a NYC Firefighter. Unfortunately our situation has risen to the levels where this communication is necessary.

Firehouse E-311/L-158 (In Jamaica Queens) is uniquely compromised of more African American Firefighters than most firehouses in FDNY. Hence, the racial atmosphere in our firehouse has been very disturbing at times. For the most part, we have tried to mitigate the racial issues which have arisen within the firefighter's rank. To our dismay, with an influx of new leadership (Lieutenants and Captains), situations at our firehouse took a wildly dramatic turn for the worse. Presently its reflective of a bygone era of the slave caste system of the 1700's. The black firefighters in our firehouse have now been:

- Falsely written up for command disciplines.
- Prevented from receiving just and fair perks as well respect often accompanying seniority.
- Victims of character assassination.
- Victims of felonious forgery on record.
- Thrown out of our firehouse, to be left for ridicule without hope of ever returning.
- Intimidated into signing paperwork.
- Successfully conspired against by leadership commanders for speaking out about the irrational and unreasonable treatment.
- Maliciously sent to the FDNY medical office for evaluation and possible drug testing.

This insane intimidating atmosphere is the norm and has been for many years for black firefighters in the FDNY.

However, the worst part is after having to endure all of the aforementioned is believing that after reporting these inconceivable acts to the proper authorities within the FDNY (EEO & B.I.T's) there would be immediate action for and protection provided. All of this should appall and sicken any sound minded person who possesses the power to cause change. Well, this couldn't be further from the truth. We have many black and female firefighters who can attest to the fact that the EEO & B.I.T's department have:

- Downplayed claims.
- Refused to attach the racial component to final commentaries.
- Religiously refused to ascertain or substantiate the racial component within individual claims.

Good morning.

The culture in the Firefighter ranks is one that is like no other, in this modern day and age.

It's actually a dual mix of overall unprofessionalism along with the racism/sexism. The reason this is important to note, is because the continued drinking on duty, porn, smoking cigarettes inside, hazing and slaving newer members (anything from forcing them to partake in making/cooking food they don't eat to having them strip naked) all ties into the expectation they have that racism is par for the course as well.

When it comes to the racism, which is anything from slurs, general racial insensitivity, to mixing it with specific political polar views (touting "pro-Trump/pro white-only and anti-minority programming such as Fox News and other shows that openly "bash" blacks, hispanics, and women, of which such purposeful tactics seem to be violation of the NYC Conflict of Interest Law), the TREATMENT of minorities is ridiculous.

They make it clear to us that "this is a White-Culture job, and all others will conform, or be shunned/excommunicated".

Black and brown Probationary Firefighters are seen as "dummer", and lesser. Whites are given favor and leniency for egregious actions and dereliction of duties, while blacks are harassed for nothing. Minorities are expected to pay for and eat a communal meal against their will, even if they have dietary restrictions. The usual white firehouse diet is a perpetual rotation of pork, cow, and shrimp daily. Nothing else. If a member doesn't eat it, they are forced to pay for a portion equivalent to their share, and then pay extra to order whatever they need to eat.

Minorities are notably sent to Engines out of the Academy at a FAR higher rate than whites. Why? Because 60-70% of the job is the Ladder Truck. Thus the dau to day work is more conducive to passing with a good grade on the Lieutenants Exam for promotion. Historically over the last 30 years or so, most "chiefs sons" are sent to Ladder Trucks. Over the last 30 years, less than 1% of chiefs have been anything other than white.

Ladder Truck experience is also unofficially mandatory for getting into a Rescue Company, the most elite of FDNY units, of which each boro only has 1 each. This lateral specialty to Special Operations Command, that the Rescues are under, comes with a 12% raise. 12% pay bump is the same difference in pay between firefighter and Lieutenant.

Speaking of "SOC" as it is known for short: SOC is the only part of the FDNY left, that has no official rules/civil service standards for selection of candidates. Literally, LITERALLY, the Commanding Officers (Captains) of the companies are allowed to "pick at will", and deny at will, with 0 criteria. Free of seniority, how good of a current company they are currently in, etc.

You are "recruited" by people you "know", grew up with etc. And by fellow Columbia (Italian American) and Emerald (Irish) Society members. And people who know each other from Long Island and Upstate, areas that are over 75-80% white/non-minority.

The captains of these companies, seek the friends of their current members. People they feel “they will get along with”. Meaning the food, culture (white politics, etc). Have you ever heard that as an acceptable way to fill a unit in the Civil Service?

I am no stranger to this, as I too have experienced it when I applied for a SOC company: having almost 10 years on, and despite being in a top 10-13 ranked Fire Duty Ladder Truck for almost half my career now, I was given the offer after I applied, to a mediocre/not so prestigious SOC company...and then the captain rescinded it once subordinate firefighters informed him that I had been involved in cooperating with and having made EEO complaints before, such as the George Floyd meme from 2020 that white members got in trouble for. His exact words to me were “guys have to be comfortable”.

This is the status quo: a vast majority of the fire department, even some non-whites who fancy themselves the “Ben Carson/Candace Owens-type”, are “uncomfortable” with racism being stood up against, if there is racism noted. You are expected to “keep your mouth shut, and put your head down and take it”. This sentiment is shared notably up to Lieutenants and Captains, who happily enforce and partake in it themselves.

The boldness is second to none. And the officers themselves sometimes seem afraid to stand against it, to defend minorities with simple fairness.

I remember being a Probationary firefighter, and white members almost jumping me for simply wearing a tshirt like everyone else. There is a strange toxic obsession with “seniority” in the fire department, and a biased towards newer members under 5 years (but especially towards those on probation, meaning 18 months or less). You are told “the sea is low, then there are the fish, and whales, and whale shit...and then Proby’s (slang for probationary firefighters) are there (under the whale sh*t)”. That, that’s how low you are. That you have no rights. And must take the racist culture of the firehouse “because it was like this before you came, it is how we have always done things”. My first firehouse, they had a roll of tissue paper with then President Obama’s face, signifying they “use his black face to white their ass”. To them, white/Republican culture and white culture are one and the same, and they must bring it with them to the firehouse, to be the atmosphere of the firehouse.

White members generally spend their down time stalking newer minority members. Telling them things like “you can’t sit down like us, stand up”. And to “always be where the senior whites can see them”. The senior whites dictate what the meal will be in most firehouses. The FDNY has failed to do away with the idea of a mandatory communal meal. Even in the Anti-Hazing Policy introduced in 2013/2014, it says “having to make the meal shall not be considered hazing”. Are we not FIREFIGHTERS?! They obsess over forcing people to make them food, to control them.

And the way they treat women is ridiculous. Like second class citizens. So many firehouses still don’t even allow women to work in the truck. If they do, they give them the “Can” position, the lowliest most meaningless simple position in the Ladder Truck. The most undesirable position.

And these people are the one’s that have to train you. Though you can die from lack of knowledge of tactics, they withhold the tips and training that they give to white colleagues. All they want blacks doing is cooking as if it is a mandatory part of the job (oh, but white food only). And a constant reminding of

their support for cops who have been convicted of corruption, so long as the cop has beaten/killed an unarmed black person. The general culture of firehouses in all 5 boros but a few, is a mix between a KKK rally and a Trump Convention. That's the closest way to describe it.

Lastly, and most importantly:

1. EEO complaints in the FDNY are NOT "confidential". The accused knows you have "ratted him out" as soon as they are interviewed. Witnesses who would confirm the racism/hazing, are intimidated into keeping quiet since when they show up, unbeknownst to them the union lawyer and/or the union rep (a firefighter) is there to hear if they will "rat". So most say "I didn't see anything". The EEO office in conjunction with the union gets away with this by never informing the witness that the rep/lawyer will already be there when they get there, and failing to inform them of their CHOICE before hand to not have anyone else in the room/meeting.
2. The FDNY uses it's "BITS" aka Bureau of Investigation of Trials Services, which is an internal version of an "Inspector General", an internal affairs bureau concerning misconduct like how the NYPD has, to take known false allegations by white members against blacks who complain. And retaliatory "tit for tat", to get revenge against, and scare those who would and have reported white members to BITS and/or EEO. Most black members who have made EEO/BITS complaints against whites, later are charged by BITS afterwards, especially if the EEO/BITS charges against the white members were proven/substantiated.
3. Once you make an EEO or BITS complaint, they (the firehouse white members) label/mark you as "done". It will be difficult to transfer to a good firehouse, pretty much IMPOSSIBLE to EVER get into SOC (as SOC captains do not have to give you a reason for rejection, nor have a uniformed criteria for selection that they can be held to for transparency), and Division Commanders will not endorse an officer (Lieutenants and Captains) to get assigned to good units if they have complained. There is no one to protect you from retaliation once you complain; it is no different than cops in the NYPD complaining to IA. Literally I recently hesitated to complain, because my complaint was about= me being retaliated against for complaining prior, if that makes sense. So I almost left it alone, because I said to myself "I am being accosted because I complained; so EEO already failed to protect me once, why do it again?" I figured it would make things worse. But right is right, and wrong is wrong.
4. Black officers when promoted to Lieutenant and Captain, though most blacks on the job are from predominantly minority areas like East Brooklyn and South Queens, are generally not granted to work in let alone be assigned in those 2 divisions (the 15th, and ESPECIALLY the 13th which is South Queens). These divisions are reserved for whites, especially if the black officers are promoted from the 8th, 11th, or 14th divisions. While white officers are allowed to work usually their whole careers between just the 15th and 13th, back and forth, especially if they have family on the job, or live in out in Long Island where the white-only connections are made.

From: farren753@gmail.com
Sent: Sunday, September 18, 2022 11:53 AM
To: Testimony
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony from Jackson Heights NY

We here on 34 ave in Jackson Heights are in DANGER. Fire trucks cannot get to us. We have open streets/closed streets. Blocks and planters have been put up with no way for fire trucks And Ambulances to get to destination. In The past week, We have had I believe three emergency events. That we have video of the trucks not being able to make the turns and ambulances double parking and walking two to three blocks to get to victims. This is not safe for fireman/women or residents. Help us. Please.

Kathy Farren. 34 Ave . NY. Farren753@gmail.com

Sent from my iPhone

From: voicesofjacksonheights@gmail.com
Sent: Sunday, September 18, 2022 8:30 PM
To: Office of Correspondence Services; Speaker Adams; public.integrity@ag.ny.gov; (rcalder@nypost.com); Testimony
Subject: [SUSPECTED SPAM] [EXTERNAL] Letter for Hearing at Committee on Fire and Emergency Management - 9/19/2022

Good morning,

I have lived in Jackson Heights since I was 5 years old. In the past years, I have married, raised a family, helped found a charter school and share a professional office in the area. It has always been a wonderful and safe place to live and work. However, since the pandemic things have changed.

We had a temporary Open Street that provide space for people to walk while social distancing. The share space was still an issue as the city started to reopen as there was an issue with traffic and parking. Also, major ADA issues arose. In all of our communications with the various agency - DOT, and others - we discussed our concerns on the ADA issues as well and the major safety issues. In particular was the concern that emergency vehicles would no be free to use the avenue (26 blocks long in a residential area). No one - including the DOT or our Council Member - was willing to hear our concerns and work with us to relieve our concerns.

Now, suddenly our temporary Open Street has been changed ta a permanent Open Street which includes 5 plazas. The plaza are a particular concern at there are various barriers - including French barricades, very large planters filled to the brim with dirt and large, solid granite blocks. there are also some bike lane dividers (metal) along the streets. Again we addressed our fears that emergency vehicles would not be able to use these streets to get to emergencies. Again we were ignored and told that our fears and statements were lies. This was openly expressed by our Council Member Krishann in a press conference that attacked our residents.

I think that my points can be clearly demonstrated via these videos from the Open Street - just from this past week.

Please help us make all changes necessary to provide safe passage for all emergency vehicles and address the traffic congestion that has resulted from this Open Street.

Thank you,
Shelley Brevda

[9/16/2022,- Part 1 Two Ambulances at Night Can't get to the building](#)



**9/16/2022,- Part 1 Two Ambulances at Night
Can't get to the building**

[9/16/2022,-Part 2. Two Ambulances at Night Can't get to the building](#)



**9/16/2022,-Part 2. Two Ambulances at Night
Can't get to the building**

[9/16/2022,-Part 2. Two Ambulances at Night Can't get to the building](#)



**9/16/2022,-Part 2. Two Ambulances at Night
Can't get to the building**

[Three block walk for EMTs to assist the resident with a medical emergency.](#)



Three block walk for EMTs to assist the resident with a medical emergency.



Three block walk for EMTs to assist the resident with a medical emergency.

[Emergency vehicles can't get through.-Part 1](#)



Emergency vehicles can't get through.-Part 1

[Part 2 Ambulance finally got to the school to care for a child whose been waiting with head trauma.](#)



Part 2 Ambulance finally got to the school to care for a child whose bee...

[Fire Engine Stuck in Northern Blvd Traffic, nowhere else to go!](#)



Fire Engine Stuck in Northern Blvd Traffic, nowhere else to go!

[Ambulance delayed trying to proceed to the call.](#)



Ambulance delayed trying to proceed to the call.

How the Covid Mandate Wrongfully Affect My Life

I joined FDNY after the events of September 11, 2001. I was proud to go through the best emergency training in the city. As FDNY EMT I proudly and safely served during the 2003 NYC Blackout, Sandy 2012 Storm, many 911 computer system crashes as a 911 Dispatcher, and most recently, the 2020 COVID 19 pandemic. Due to my FDNY EMS Training; I understood and followed my Body Substance Isolation protocols.

I wear a mask. I practice social distance. I never showed up to work with flu-like symptoms. I COVID tested once a week. I followed all of FDNY COVID19 reasonable accommodations. In between this time I was sick to the stomach and nauseous. I went into work with a knot in my stomach wondering if this is the day I will be sent home. For two years I kept a reasonable caution lifestyle for living during COVID PANDEMIC. My only fear was with the unreasonable unjust policy of New York City. Never, in all my years (2001 to 2022) did I ever think FDNY would not allow me to practice my religion. Never in all of my life, did I ever think that I would have to prove my religion to my employment.

Due to New York City of New York Covid Mandate; I was required to submit my body to the Covid-19 Vaccine and allow myself to go against my sincere personal belief (religious) NOT TO PUT ANY HARMFUL KNOW/UNKNOWN, POSSIBLY HARMFUL SUBSTANCE INTO MY BODY. I was also required to allow myself to undergo INVASIVE, EXCESSIVE NEEDLESSLY PAINFUL PCR COVID-19 TEST (nasopharyngeal) testing whereas USE of effective saliva test(NAAT) SALIVA NUCLEIC AMPLIFICATION covid-19 test is painless, simpler, EFFECTIVE AS PCR.

I requested Reasonable Accommodation that I feel would resolve the conflict between my religious practices such as: COVID 19 TESTING OPTIONS, SELF EVALUATION.QUESTIONNAIRE, TEMPERATURE TAKING, MASK WEARING, SOCIAL DISTANCING, FREQUENT HAND WASHING, NOT REPORTING TO WORK WITH FLU LIKE SYMPTOMS.

My faith, My creed, My moral conscious based belief to live as a Muslim was discriminated and violated. Experimentation is not permitted on a human being. Harm to an individual is a sin. I DO NOT ACCEPT THE PREMISE OF QUESTION comparing LONG STANDING VACCINE & NEW CLINICAL TRIAL EXPERIMENTAL TYPE VACCINE.

I am responsible for MY life and My charge. As I am responsible for my conscience; My faith commands. DO NO HARM TO MYSELF. THIS COVID VACCINE MANDATE was put upon employees of The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) under duress. I respectfully and humbly requested UNDER PROTEST AGAINST BEING FORCED OUT OF MY EMPLOYMENT.

It goes against my conscious and religious beliefs TO DO HARM TO MYSELF. I REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE OR VOLUNTEER IN MEDICAL PROCEDURE AS THERE IS NO INFORMED DECISION. I CANNOT GIVE FULL CONSENT.

Religious discrimination in the work place. I experience this in my higher education and in my community. I have never thought I would have to prove my religion to continue working for FDNY. I am a practicing Muslim and I effectively worked for FDNY. My religion never stopped me from performing my duties. However, FDNY mandates me to inject unknown, possibly harmful substances into my body. FDNY offers no liability for injuries.

I worked with FDNY serving populations with HIV, HEPATITIS, TUBERCULOSIS, EBOLA, MENINGITIS, CHICKEN POX, MEASLES, and also during the COVID PANDEMIC. I performed my job safely and effectively because we do proper body substance isolation practices. We are informed of symptoms, we do assessments and we are informed when not to enter the home. During any contact that we have in a professional capacity, we are instructed to wear a face mask at all times. We are also instructed to keep a safe distance from those whom we interact with in a professional capacity.

I feel that I am a valued, long time, experienced employee working with the New York City Fire Department (FDNY). I was wrongfully and punitively terminated.

September 19, 2022

The “Sheds” must go.

Like most New York resident/taxpayers, I did not object to the emergency measures taken by the city to support the hospitality industry when the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

Now that lockdowns, vaccine mandates, mask mandates are receding, it is time to remove these unregulated structures that pose an obstruction to emergency vehicles from our streets and sidewalks.

Apart from the sanitation and environmental problems they cause, the lack of access for fire trucks and ambulances is a crisis. A bad example of “profits before people”, the Open Streets and Open Restaurants needs to go back to the drawing board and see what conditions must be met prior to giving our streets to private entities to profit.

“First do no harm” is the Hippocratic oath doctors are supposed to work by. I suggest that the City might start to operate by this philosophy too.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Assistant Commissioner Nafeesah Nooran

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chief John Hodgens

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Assistant Commissioner Don Nguyen

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chief Malcolm Moore

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 09/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Corey Boykins

Address: _____ West 101st Street _____ 10025

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: William L West

Address: 244 st

I represent: Myself AS a Firefighter

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anita Daniel

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deputy Commissioner Lizette Christoff

Address: _____

I represent: FDNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tyeisha Pugh

Address: 177 Street

I represent: United Women Firefighters + Vulcan Society

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alonzo Baker

Address: metro tech

I represent: Vulcan Society of FOMY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 560 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KIRSTEN JOHN FOL

Address: 410 LEXINGTON AVE

I represent: THE ARC OF JUSTICE

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 19 Sept 22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Louis Holmes
Address: Nassau Ave Brooklyn, NY 11222
I represent: Myself
Address: N/A

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 5194560 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophy Medina via Tejesha Pugh
Address: _____
I represent: Sophy Medina FONY R.
Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jadine-Michelle Martinez
Address: _____
I represent: United Women Firefighters Association
Address: 219 West 19th Street Manhattan, NY