

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT

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November 28, 2023  
Start: 10:07 a.m.  
Recess: 10:49 a.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Joann Ariola, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr  
Robert F. Holden  
Ari Kagan  
Kevin C. Riley  
Lynn C. Schulman  
Kalman Yeger

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Eric Dinowitz

A P P E A R A N C E S

Michael Fields, Chief of Fire Department of New York Emergency Medical Services Operations

Oren Barzilay, 28-year veteran of FDNY EMS, and President of EMS Local 2507

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Today's date is  
3 November 28, 2023. Today's hearing is on the  
4 Committee on Fire and Emergency Management. Location  
5 in the Committee Room. Being recorded by Keith  
6 Polite.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. Good  
8 morning and welcome to the New York City hybrid  
9 hearing on the Committee on Fire and Emergency  
10 Management.

11 Please silence all electronic devices at  
12 this time.

13 Please do not approach the dais. If you  
14 have any questions, please raise your hand and one of  
15 us, the Sergeant-at-Arms, will kindly assist you.

16 Thank you for your kind cooperation.

17 Chair, we are ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Good morning. My name  
19 is Joann Ariola, and I am the Chair of Fire and  
20 Emergency Management Committee.

21 I would like to acknowledge that I'm  
22 joined here at the table with my Colleague, Eric  
23 Dinowitz, and Joseph Borelli, our Minority Leader.

24 Today's hearing will focus on four bills  
25 that aim to strengthen our city's emergency response

2 as well as better equip our first responders to serve  
3 the public.

4 Introduction 138 introduced by Council  
5 Member Yeger would require the Fire Department to  
6 provide vehicle insurance, access to medical  
7 supplies, and ambulance driver training for volunteer  
8 ambulance services.

9 Intro. number 903 introduced by Minority  
10 Leader Borelli would require the Fire Department to  
11 provide the type of body armor it determines would be  
12 most suitable for the protection of its employees  
13 engaged in emergency medical services.

14 Introduction number 904 also introduced  
15 by Minority Leader Borelli would require the Fire  
16 Department to provide a de-escalation and self  
17 defense training to its employees who provide medical  
18 services. Such training would be available at least  
19 once per calendar year.

20 Introduction 1167 introduced by Council  
21 Member Dinowitz would require the Commissioner of  
22 Emergency Management in consultation with the Office  
23 of the Mayor and the Community Boards to identify and  
24 designate facilities within each Community District  
25 to serve as rapid emergency response centers. Each

2 center would be required to stock supplies for  
3 residents that have been displaced by a natural,  
4 human-caused disaster. This bill would also require  
5 the Commissioner of Emergency Management in  
6 consultation with the Commissioner of Citywide  
7 Administrative Services to submit an annual report to  
8 the Mayor and to the Speaker of the City Council  
9 regarding the inventory of supplies in each Community  
10 District's rapid emergency response center.

11 The collection of legislation will  
12 provide additional support and protection to our  
13 brave New Yorkers who work to provide emergency  
14 medical services.

15 I'd like to thank all those from the  
16 public as well that are here as well as  
17 representatives from the Administration who are here  
18 to provide testimony.

19 I will now turn the microphone over to  
20 Minority Leader Borelli for his opening remarks.

21 MINORITY LEADER BORELLI: Thank you,  
22 Chairwoman. It's nice to see you with the gavel that  
23 I held for a couple years. It was a lot of fun.

24 Last September, EMT Captain Alison Russo,  
25 a 24-year veteran of the FDNY, was standing outside

2 of her station in Astoria Queens. Unfortunately, we  
3 know the results of what happened that day. She was  
4 brutally stabbed to death. Unfortunately, the number  
5 of attacks on EMTs has significantly risen since  
6 2020. There were 168 attacks on EMTs in 2018. That  
7 number doubled to 386 in 2021. So far this year  
8 through July, 121 attacks have been committed on our  
9 EMTs. We know our EMTs are, for better or worse,  
10 whether they want to be or not, they are the  
11 frontline of our service delivery in our city. The  
12 goal of these two bills, Intro. 903 and Intro. 904  
13 will be to protect them, protect them in a way that  
14 we've done or we've tried to do in the past but not  
15 done a very good job. We know the FDNY currently  
16 provides body armor in many cases to many EMTs, but  
17 this bill would require specific gear fit and sized  
18 for individual EMTs so that they can have the best  
19 protection possible.

20 Intro. 904 would require the Department  
21 to provide self defense and de-escalation training,  
22 and I recognize that it's not the goal of this  
23 Department or any Fire Department to have to deal  
24 with self defense tactics and techniques amongst  
25 members of an entity that doesn't routinely deal with

2 violent people. Nonetheless, we're at the point in  
3 our city's history where with hundreds of attacks  
4 each year on EMTs, we simply have no choice so I  
5 thank the Chair for hearing this bill and I thank the  
6 Department for weighing in.

7 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you, Minority  
8 Leader. I now turn to Eric Dinowitz who will speak on  
9 his bill.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,  
11 Chair. Good morning. I'm proud to be here this  
12 morning to advocate for bill 1167, which was  
13 introduced by myself along with Council Member Riley  
14 at the Stated Meeting of September 14, 2023, and  
15 thank you, Chair Ariola, for putting this on the  
16 agenda.

17 This bill requires the Department of  
18 Emergency Management to identify and designate  
19 facilities within each Community District to serve as  
20 rapid response centers that would stock supplies for  
21 residents that have been displaced by natural or  
22 human-caused disasters. The bill was inspired by our  
23 experience on the scene of a building fire in the  
24 Wakefield section of the Bronx earlier this year.  
25 While on the scene, Council Member Riley and I

2 learned that 61 individuals were displaced from their  
3 homes that evening with few City resources to fall  
4 back on. We were in the school together, was the  
5 emergency site where we all met and, sure they had  
6 food, but they didn't have clothing or other  
7 materials for the next day, things students needed to  
8 get to school the next day, clothing, adults needed  
9 to get to work the next day. It just so happened,  
10 luckily, that in Senator Bailey's office, in Council  
11 Member Riley's office, and at the school they  
12 happened to have clothing available for some people,  
13 but we can't be a city that relies on luck or on  
14 circumstance. We have to ensure that we are providing  
15 the resources necessary so in the case of an  
16 emergency, in the case of a disaster, people have the  
17 support and the materials that they need to, as best  
18 as they can, move on with their lives. As the years  
19 progress, the need for these emergency response  
20 centers becomes increasingly urgent. The rapid  
21 flooding of our city in September on top of the  
22 proliferation of fires citywide underscore the  
23 imperative to provide material support to affected  
24 communities, many of whom are among our city's most  
25 vulnerable. In addition, of course, as climate change

2 continues to progress, reports show that as many as  
3 40 percent of New Yorkers, particularly low-income  
4 New Yorkers, will fall victim to displacement as the  
5 result of flooding, storm surges, and rising sea  
6 levels. With emergency relief centers, we can empower  
7 our City to take swift and concrete action in the  
8 face of unpredictable disasters.

9 I want to once again thank Chair Ariola  
10 and the Members of the Committee on Fire and  
11 Emergency Management for the opportunity to speak  
12 today and encourage all my Colleagues to join the 18  
13 other co-sponsors on this bill, Intro. 1167.

14 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you. I'd like  
15 to acknowledge that Council Member Kagan is here, and  
16 now I will turn the mic over to Will Hongach.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL HONGACH: Thank you,  
18 Chair. We'll now hear testimony from Chief Michael  
19 Fields of the New York City Fire Department Bureau of  
20 Emergency Medical Services.

21 Before we begin, I will administer the  
22 affirmation. Please raise your right hand.

23 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
24 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this

2 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
3 questions?

4 CHIEF FIELDS: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL HONGACH: Thank you.

6 CHIEF FIELDS: Good morning, Chair Ariola,  
7 Members of the Fire and Emergency Management  
8 Committee, and the sponsors of today's legislation.

9 My name is Michael Fields, and I am the  
10 Chief for the Emergency Medical Services for the City  
11 of New York FDNY. I appreciate the opportunity to  
12 speak with you today about legislation being  
13 considered by the Council.

14 Introduction 903 will require the Fire  
15 Department to provide body armor to all Emergency  
16 Medical Services members. Under the legislation, the  
17 body armor shall meet a ballistic resistance or stab  
18 resistant standard of the National Institute of  
19 Justice or any successor standards. No employee shall  
20 be permitted to retain the body armor after leaving  
21 the Fire Department or the move in to a position that  
22 does not involve the provision of Emergency Medical  
23 Services. The Fire Department currently makes  
24 ballistic vests available to all EMS members. Each  
25 new member is fitted for a vest upon leaving the EMS

2 Academy. Replacement vests are made available every  
3 five years. The safety of EMS members is paramount.  
4 We agree with and are supportive of this legislation.

5 Introduction 138 will require the Fire  
6 Department to provide vehicle insurance, access to  
7 medical supplies, and ambulance driver training for  
8 volunteer ambulance services. Volunteer companies  
9 operate outside of the FDNY and, generally speaking,  
10 do not participate in the 9-1-1 system. We have great  
11 admiration for the volunteers who operate these  
12 services and the work they perform. Some volunteer  
13 companies have been stepped up to provide support to  
14 the Department during extraordinary circumstances  
15 such as during the COVID pandemic and we are grateful  
16 for that. From a fiscal standpoint, the requirements  
17 of this legislation would be very challenging to  
18 fulfill. By our calculations, there are approximately  
19 30 volunteer ambulance services operating in New York  
20 City. They are various sizes. Some operate  
21 consistently and some may only operate on certain  
22 days of the week or when volunteers are available.  
23 The initial cost to outfit a basic life support  
24 ambulance with supplies is approximately 80,000  
25 dollars. This includes hard equipment such as

2 defibrillators, splints, boards, and scopes as well  
3 as soft equipment such as bandages and oxygen masks.  
4 The cost increases to approximately 125,000 for an  
5 advanced life support ambulance, which is used for  
6 response to more acute calls. There are additional  
7 costs to maintain appropriate levels as supplies are  
8 used in the field.

9           Providing driver training for voluntary  
10 companies will also be costly as well as  
11 operationally challenging. The EMS Academy on Fort  
12 Totten is used for incoming classes of EMTs as well  
13 as for refresher course training for members to  
14 maintain certification and advanced instructions for  
15 paramedics and EMS officers. As the Committee is  
16 aware, we have expanded our Fort Totten facility in  
17 recent years to better accommodate larger EMS classes  
18 and training. Using FDNY facilities to provide the  
19 training of all volunteer drivers in New York City  
20 will displace FDNY personnel training and necessitate  
21 increased overtime for instructors.

22           Finally, obtaining insurance policies for  
23 volunteer ambulances would be extremely costly,  
24 particularly since the City of New York is self-  
25 insured, and the FDNY does not operate under vehicle

2 insurance. Extending this benefit to volunteer  
3 companies will create a liability for the City and  
4 for taxpayers. This would be a questionable use of  
5 resources given that the Department does not monitor  
6 volunteer drivers, has no insight into their  
7 operation or ongoing activities, and has no way of  
8 incentivizing or enforcing safe operations. The New  
9 York City Law Department also has concerns about  
10 potential liabilities associated with this  
11 legislation. Though we value the work of volunteer  
12 companies and the women and men who volunteer their  
13 time to serve their communities, it would be  
14 extraordinarily difficult for the Fire Department to  
15 comply with Introduction 138 if it was to become law.

16 Introduction 904 would require the Fire  
17 Department to develop de-escalation and self defense  
18 training for all Emergency Medical Services. The  
19 training would be required to address the unique  
20 characteristics and operations of Emergency Medical  
21 Services with a particular focus on violent  
22 situations in the context of patient care. It should  
23 include recognition and understanding of mental  
24 illness and distress, effective communication skills,  
25 conflict de-escalation techniques, and self defense

1 techniques. The Department would be required to offer  
2 this training no less than frequently than one per  
3 calendar year. I mentioned this point earlier, but it  
4 bears repeating. The Fire Department values the  
5 safety of our members above all else. In the past  
6 five years, we have experienced tragedy twice, losing  
7 two EMS members to violence that they experienced  
8 while on duty. De-escalation and self defense  
9 training is necessary, and the Department does  
10 provide this type of training. EMS members  
11 participate in a 12-hour training regiment that is  
12 conducted in partnership with New York City H and H.  
13 The program is focused on situational awareness, de-  
14 escalation techniques, managing patients who are  
15 experiencing a mental health crisis and patients who  
16 are potentially violent. In addition, members receive  
17 instructions on contacting others for assistance  
18 during an escalating situation or emergency including  
19 communicating with law enforcement. The training that  
20 we provide now does not comply with the provisions of  
21 Introduction 904 that will require it be offered  
22 annually. However, the Department does offer a  
23 portion of that training on the LMS system which is  
24 available in all EMS stations at any time. We are  
25

2 always exploring ways to make our members safer so we  
3 are happy to continue engaging with the Council to  
4 develop a version of this legislation that is  
5 satisfactory for all.

6 I will be happy to take any questions at  
7 this time.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: I'd just like to note  
9 that we've been joined by Council Member Yeger.

10 Thank you for your testimony, and I'm  
11 very happy to see that you are in favor of a number  
12 of the bills, but I see that you have some issues  
13 with 138, and Council Member Yeger is here so I just  
14 have a couple of questions and then I'll yield to you  
15 because I do think that it's very important for us to  
16 give training to our volunteer fire and ambulance  
17 corps. I have five in my District alone, and they  
18 could use the help.

19 What type of training does the Department  
20 provide to individuals who drivers of ambulances?

21 CHIEF FIELDS: In respects to (INAUDIBLE)

22 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: In respects to the  
23 EMS, Fire Department.

24 CHIEF FIELDS: In respects to EVOC, we  
25 offer evasive vehicle operational course. That is a

2 four-day course in which we teach them the operations  
3 of ambulances, how to avoid accidents, pretty much  
4 vehicle defensive driving for ambulances.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You said it was 12  
6 hours, you said?

7 CHIEF FIELDS: It's over a three-day  
8 course. One is in-day and then there's two days  
9 that's field operations.

10 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Do all EMS personnel  
11 receive this training or just drivers?

12 CHIEF FIELDS: Every EMS worker receives  
13 the training. We don't have ambulance drivers.  
14 They're all EMTs or paramedics.

15 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. Does a shift  
16 have a designated driver for each ambulance?

17 CHIEF FIELDS: Yes. Either one of the  
18 members can drive. They make that determination based  
19 on operational needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay. Do you know how  
21 many volunteer ambulance companies that are  
22 recognized by the Fire Department in the city in the  
23 five boroughs?

24

25

2 CHIEF FIELDS: I believe I gave testimony  
3 that there are 30, and 17 of them assist in 9-1-1  
4 operations whenever called upon.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: And you provide those  
6 services to these recognized volunteer fire and  
7 ambulance companies or no?

8 CHIEF FIELDS: You're saying can we or did  
9 we? I'm sorry.

10 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Do you?

11 CHIEF FIELDS: No, we do not.

12 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: You recognize them  
13 but you don't want to give them any training? You  
14 haven't.

15 CHIEF FIELDS: We have not given them any  
16 training.

17 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Okay.

18 CHIEF FIELDS: We do recognize that they  
19 are community-based. They are definitely a part of  
20 the community system. Any time that we had an  
21 epidemic or a pandemic, we asked NYCEM to activate  
22 the mutual aid for which they in turn, sometimes they  
23 can assist, other times they can't. Logistically, we  
24 cannot provide the services to them because we don't  
25 have enough real estate barely for our members so

2 during these fiscal times, in order for us to train  
3 or up-staff so that we can provide EVOC services to  
4 30 ambulance companies that volunteer, that will be a  
5 lot of money that we have to push out, a lot of  
6 resources, a lot of staffing power that we have to  
7 put out, and more importantly we don't have the real  
8 estate. We lost some buildings recently, one being a  
9 building inside of Port Channel which we did the B-  
10 HEARD training, and then we lost another building to  
11 the United States military at Fort Totten so the  
12 resources that we have right now to do the actual  
13 classes have decreased as well as the EVOC field.  
14 Even though we expanded on it, we expanded to  
15 accommodate the 200 members that we push out each  
16 class. Now to be adding additional load to that, I  
17 don't think that we can sustain it right now.

18 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: But if you rely on  
19 them, wouldn't it be in your best interest to train  
20 them so that they go with the same policy and  
21 procedure that the FDNY uses as a commonsense  
22 precaution?

23 CHIEF FIELDS: I don't think so. I don't  
24 think that that's the commonsense precaution to it. I  
25 believe that even though we call on them for times of

2 need, every EMT inside the State of New York operates  
3 under New York State protocol so for them to be an  
4 EMT, they need to have certain trainings that come  
5 along with their community-based ambulance corps. I  
6 don't believe that the Fire Department is indeed  
7 responsible for making sure that they have that  
8 training.

9 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Where do they get  
10 that training now? Would it be private company, maybe  
11 they pay for it?

12 CHIEF FIELDS: Correct. They get through  
13 whatever private company or community college that  
14 offers EMT courses. We train our own at FDNY. I'm not  
15 quite sure where they get their training from.

16 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Council Member Yeger,  
17 did you have questions?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you, Madam  
19 Chair. Morning, how are you?

20 CHIEF FIELDS: Good morning.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Okay. I'm not going  
22 to speak to all the volunteer ambulance corps in the  
23 city, and I understand there's two dozen, maybe three  
24 dozen, but there's one that I'm very familiar with

2 and I'm sure with. It's Hatzalah. I'm sure you've  
3 heard of it.

4 CHIEF FIELDS: I have.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Okay. Hatzalah  
6 every single day responds to 250 calls that result in  
7 transports to hospitals. There are many thousands  
8 more emergency calls that Hatzalah responds to that  
9 are not transports, that are simply providing  
10 assistance on the site and don't result in a  
11 transport to a hospital. That's about 65,000 to  
12 75,000 calls a year. Those are calls that would  
13 otherwise go to the 9-1-1 system where an FD  
14 ambulance would have to respond so, while I recognize  
15 the cost implications in your testimony and I  
16 understand that these things cost money, but it's  
17 also a fact I think, and I don't think it's a  
18 disputable fact, that the existence of these  
19 volunteer corps, and particularly the one that I am  
20 most familiar with, result in a cost savings to the  
21 City. In other words, if tomorrow morning, these two  
22 to three dozen ambulance corps would no longer exist,  
23 9-1-1 would collapse. The Fire Department system  
24 would not be able to respond to the influx of calls  
25 that would now have to flow to 9-1-1 instead of going

2 to the volunteer ambulances that are doing these  
3 transports. Given that, and I don't think, like I  
4 said, it's disputable and for sure you're here and  
5 feel free to dispute it if you wish, isn't it  
6 ultimately a cost savings to the taxpayers?

7 CHIEF FIELDS: I do not believe that the  
8 9-1-1 would collapse if we took on an additional  
9 65,000 calls. I believe that the EMTs and the  
10 paramedics within the New York City Fire Department  
11 as well as how it's managed would be able to take on  
12 those calls. We are extremely, extremely grateful for  
13 the work that Hatzalah does inside their communities  
14 as well as throughout the city. We are thankful for  
15 any community-based ambulance that decides to lobby  
16 their community for donations and then they provide  
17 voluntary services to those communities so that they  
18 can assist with the 9-1-1 system. I do, undisputable,  
19 believe that yes, it is definitely, you do assist  
20 with the call volume and we are appreciative towards  
21 that. Is it a cost savings? I don't believe so. First  
22 off, somebody would have to tell me how many  
23 personnel does Hatzalah as well as every community  
24 ambulance corps has. You may have some places in  
25 which they have two voluntaries and you may have

2 other places that may have 1,000. Of those 1,000  
3 volunteers that they have, how many of them actually  
4 volunteer and does service work within those  
5 communities? Some just show up once every year or so  
6 to say I did a tour on the ambulance, but the Fire  
7 Department would then be responsible to ensuring that  
8 each one of those members that say that they are a  
9 volunteer, whether at Hatzalah, whether at Bravo,  
10 whether at Prospect Park Ambulance, whether at  
11 Central Park Ambulance, were trained. I think that  
12 has a heavy lift. I don't think that that's cost  
13 savings. Additionally, how many ambulances do each  
14 one of these have? We are self-insured. What's the  
15 average insurance policy for an ambulance on a daily  
16 basis, and then you have to take into account what is  
17 their DMV record so if somebody who has more  
18 violations than others, therefore the insurance is  
19 going to go up so right now, just in the world of  
20 utopia, I don't think that that is indeed a cost  
21 savings that gets offset by the 65,000 calls in which  
22 Hatzalah does. By no means am I asking that you lobby  
23 toward Hatzalah and tell them that.. (INAUDIBLE)

24 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: I appreciate that,  
25 Chief. I can answer some of these questions for you.

1 I'm happy to do that because I don't think it's a  
2 good thing that if the Fire Department doesn't know  
3 these answers and so I appreciate the back and forth.  
4 The answer is that there are 110 Hatzalah ambulances  
5 in New York City. Some of which I've spent the last  
6 six years in office buying through capital for  
7 Hatzalah, and by no means have I been able to do all  
8 110, but there are 110 ambulances. Unlike the Fire  
9 Department ambulances, Hatzalah ambulances are taken  
10 out when needed as opposed to Fire Department  
11 ambulances which are done on a shift so if there's no  
12 call, they're just sitting there and waiting for the  
13 next call. There are 1,700 Hatzalah volunteers who  
14 have radios on 24/7, 300 of which are paramedics.  
15 Now, of course, that doesn't mean that 1,700 people  
16 respond to a single call, but they're also not  
17 getting paid so that cost savings to the City when a  
18 call goes to the Hatzalah system and somebody jumps  
19 into a car, goes to that call, and ultimately  
20 somebody else goes to the garage, grabs an ambulance  
21 and goes to that call, and, if it results in a  
22 transfer, that's many, many minutes that the 9-1-1  
23 system, and I appreciate your faith in it, you say it  
24 won't collapse, I think that the facts lead to a very  
25

1 different conclusion. The reality is that what we're  
2 seeing in the last couple of years is response times  
3 for FD ambulances are going up, not down. Maybe by  
4 seconds, but seconds count in situations like this.  
5 Again, I'm not lobbying for you to put Hatzalah  
6 volunteers on the payroll of the Fire Department.  
7 What I'm saying I think in this bill, and I'm not the  
8 inventor of this bill, this is a bill that's been  
9 around for over a decade, predecessors of mine in  
10 this Council and previous Councils have introduced  
11 this, the idea is that the taxpayers are gaining from  
12 the existence of these volunteer corps all around the  
13 city, and there are some that maybe just have one or  
14 two ambulances that serve a very particular,  
15 localized neighborhood, but when you have a citywide  
16 system, and this is where the comparison that I'm  
17 able to do and I hope you are as well with Hatzalah  
18 where from the top of the Bronx to the bottom of  
19 Staten Island and all across the city, they are able  
20 to take hundreds and hundreds of calls a day off your  
21 books, and I really think that, while I admire your  
22 faith and confidence in the 9-1-1 system and in the  
23 Fire Department's capacity to respond to emergency  
24 calls, I think it's, please accept this with respect,  
25

2 misplaced. It's simply something that I don't see  
3 possible given particularly the response times.

4 My last point, even if we were to take  
5 for granted that you're right, that it wouldn't  
6 collapse, I think that at the very least we can admit  
7 that the response times would go up at an exponential  
8 cost that we would not be able to afford in terms of  
9 life-saving because if it takes five minutes for an  
10 ambulance to show up from the Fire Department then  
11 because of an influx of calls that are now being put  
12 on the Fire Department's books, it now takes seven,  
13 eight minutes per call, those extra minutes are  
14 lives, and they will cost lives so I would just urge  
15 you to consider that in your opposition to this bill  
16 because I do think that there's a way that the  
17 taxpayers can partner a little better and can pick up  
18 some of the costs of these volunteer ambulance corps  
19 all across the city because those systems are taking  
20 the work off the FD's books, and that's all for me.  
21 Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Chief.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you, Council  
23 Member. Do any other Council Members have questions?

24 We've been joined by Council Member Carr  
25 and Council Member Holden.

2 Any other questions?

3 Chief, thank you for your testimony.

4 CHIEF FIELDS: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: We can move now to  
6 public testimony.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL HONGACH: Oren Barzilay.

8 OREN BARZILAY: Good morning, Committee  
9 Chairperson and Honorable Council Members. My name is  
10 Oren Barzilay. I'm a 28-year veteran of FDNY EMS, and  
11 I'm the President of EMS Local 2507.

12 I'm here today to speak on behalf of more  
13 than 4,000 uniformed FDNY EMTs, paramedics, and fire  
14 inspectors. New York's EMTs serve in the most  
15 renowned fire department in the country, perhaps one  
16 of the most renowned in the entire world, and they  
17 are tasked with responding to an incredible number of  
18 emergencies each year. In 2022, EMS responded to 1.58  
19 million calls for medical emergencies and, according  
20 to the Mayor's Report, this is 100,000 calls  
21 increased from 2021. At its current pace, EMS is  
22 expected to respond to over 1.6 million medical calls  
23 by year end 2023, again surpassing the previous year.  
24 I'm here today to spotlight very considerable issues  
25 for our city EMTs who despite their pivotal role in

1 serving and protecting New Yorkers, we are  
2 horrifically supported with resources from our City  
3 government. EMT assaults are at an all-time high,  
4 doubling in the last year, and many hundreds of our  
5 members are not even reporting them due to a lack of  
6 any action at all by both the Department, the City,  
7 and the judicial system. When we arrive at the scene  
8 of an emergency, we don't carry guns like our  
9 counterparts, NYPD, we don't have axes like our Fire  
10 Department, firefighters brethren. We roll up in the  
11 scene of an emergency with a doctor's bag to provide  
12 medical care. What is the City going to do to fix  
13 this? I urge the Committee to pass legislation so  
14 that all EMTs and paramedics are not left alone in  
15 the back of an ambulance. It must be mandated for the  
16 FDNY to require a three-man crew in an ambulance.  
17 This way, no one is ever left alone. Furthermore, all  
18 of our supervisors respond on their own without any  
19 additional resources. They also need to have an aide  
20 as well. If you're faced with such high chance of  
21 getting assaulted in your workplace, it's the  
22 employer's responsibility to keep the workplace safe.  
23 That protection of our members is absolutely not  
24 happening right now. Perhaps it's time that the City  
25

1 designate EMTs and paramedics as peace officers. EMS  
2 is being totally and completely starved of necessary  
3 resources to allow us to work safely and protect the  
4 City's citizens at the same time. Right now, the FDNY  
5 is providing body armor and ballistic vests on a  
6 voluntary basis. The tragic uptick in stories about  
7 EMTs and paramedics being brutally assaulted is  
8 worrying and alarming. That is why we need guaranteed  
9 permanent five-year replacement policy in the  
10 provisions of body armor. We feel strongly about  
11 keeping our members prepared for any situation or  
12 scenario, even in the case they are faced with  
13 danger. The FDNY's de-escalation and self defense  
14 training course for emergency first responders is a  
15 good step of our members. However, it is clear that  
16 given that frequency of assaults on our members, this  
17 training needs to be more than just one and done. It  
18 needs to be mandatory yearly training. If the  
19 expectation is to keep the EMTs with the FDNY while  
20 also attracting new members, there must be a sizable  
21 investment from the City that demonstrates commitment  
22 to this Department. The alarming trend of surging  
23 assaults is causing our members to leave the  
24 Department altogether to find work that is safer and  
25

2 also pays more. The dedicated women and men of EMS  
3 and the citizens we are sworn to protect absolutely  
4 deserve better protection.

5 In closing, we are opposed to Intro. bill  
6 number 138. This will be a slap in the face to all  
7 the men and women in EMS. If the City can afford to  
8 pay for insurance for the privates, why can't they  
9 afford to pay us more than the minimum wage?

10 Thank you for your time and  
11 consideration.

12 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you so much,  
13 and thank you so much for all you do for the EMS.  
14 You're a pleasure to work with. We're just going to  
15 hold for one moment if you don't mind because Council  
16 Member Holden does have questions, but Council Member  
17 Riley is here and just wants to speak briefly on his  
18 bill.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair  
20 Ariola, and thank you to my Colleagues. I'll be brief  
21 and excuse my tardiness.

22 Thank you, Chair Ariola and your Staff,  
23 for the opportunity to have this bill be heard today.  
24 I'm here as a co-sponsor of Intro. 1167 with my  
25 Colleague, Council Member Eric Dinowitz, a critical

1 piece of legislation aimed at fortifying our citywide  
2 emergency response efforts. Emergency situations  
3 demand a proactive and comprehensive approach from  
4 our City that supports and uplifts our community.  
5 Council Member Dinowitz and I have firsthand  
6 experience navigating the immense challenges faced by  
7 families in crisis. In the wake of a devastating  
8 apartment fire in the Bronx Wakefield section, which  
9 Council Member Dinowitz and I serve, where 61 people  
10 were displaced in January, we witnessed the profound  
11 impact on families and the surrounding communities.  
12 The devastating impact of fires and other adversities  
13 in NYC extends beyond the physical damage, deeply  
14 affecting communities by displacing families,  
15 disrupting lives, and creating urgent needs, thus  
16 emphasizing the critical necessary need for swift and  
17 holistic support to aid the victims in their  
18 recovery. Navigating our City's service systems  
19 during such emergencies revealed immediate and severe  
20 supply challenges. This experience underscored the  
21 urgent need for accessible emergency relief centers  
22 in every Community District. Intro. 1167 stands as a  
23 beacon of hope to address the need and significantly  
24

2 enhance of our City emergency response  
3 infrastructure.

4 I extend my gratitude to the 16 Council  
5 Members who already endorsed Intro. 1167 and  
6 affirming their commitment to safeguarding vulnerable  
7 New Yorkers. I continue to urge each of my Colleagues  
8 to lend their support to this crucial legislation. By  
9 signing onto this legislation, we collectively stand  
10 behind the establishment of emergency relief centers  
11 citywide.

12 I want to thank the men and women at the  
13 Fire Department for the hard work, the men and women  
14 with our EMS Department for their hard work as well  
15 who helped out with this fire that took place in  
16 January and just think that this will be an  
17 additional resource to the communities that we serve  
18 each and every day.

19 Thank you, Chair Ariola, for this  
20 opportunity to speak, and I'm looking forward to the  
21 support from my Colleagues. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Thank you, Council  
23 Member Riley. Thank you both for your patience.  
24 Council Member Holden.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Oren,  
3 and thank all the men and women under you because,  
4 again, during the pandemic they were amazing. They  
5 didn't work remotely, they couldn't work remotely,  
6 and they had all these extra hurdles to overcome so,  
7 again, I thank you not only for your testimony but  
8 for your service.

9 I have some questions. You mentioned in  
10 your testimony that EMT assaults all-time high,  
11 doubling in the last year. Can you explain why that's  
12 happening? Do you see a trend out there? Because I  
13 do. I'll mention what I think it is, but just what  
14 you're seeing on the ground.

15 OREN BARZILAY: Ever since the bail reform  
16 was implemented, crimes, even though the reports may  
17 reflect otherwise, the crimes are up, crimes are  
18 high. People commit a crime and two, three hours  
19 later they're out the door committing the same crime  
20 again. Our police officers do their best, but when  
21 they realize that the DAs are not pushing for felony  
22 assaults which the law requires them to do, they make  
23 plea deals with them, and the public knows this. The  
24 public knows that it's a revolving door with the  
25 judicial system.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: It's crime

3 obviously, and I went through this living in the '70s  
4 and '80s, we saw actual arsonists trying to burn  
5 neighborhoods down or for whatever reason and then  
6 when the Fire Department responded, bricks from the  
7 roof and that was a regular occurrence. I don't know  
8 if you remember that, but that was a big deal. I  
9 think it also has to do with the lack of police. I  
10 was at a scene in my neighborhood. There was an  
11 accident and EMS showed up first, and they actually  
12 said to us, cops are probably not even show up to  
13 this, but there was an argument that ensued between a  
14 car accident and the two drivers were at each other.  
15 In fact, my Staff and I had to kind of jump in  
16 between and so did the EMS workers to try to break it  
17 up. It's going to get worse before it gets better I  
18 think because we're losing a lot of cops. We're  
19 obviously losing a lot of men and women in EMS and  
20 EMTs, but it's going to be more stress because the  
21 response time. I have police not responding in my  
22 District to 9-1-1 calls. They don't even show up. If  
23 it's a car accident, almost like the EMTs know that  
24 they're there and that's it, nobody else is there,  
25 and many times there's an argument in a car accident,

2 and that's why we need backup, we need police. Just  
3 the fact that we have to talk about a bulletproof  
4 vest for an EMT worker and just the fact that we have  
5 to train, that you want training, is kind of a  
6 disgrace that this is what our predicament is.

7           You said it's doubled in the last year.  
8 Was there a trend upward, that we were getting more  
9 assaults in the previous years.

10           OREN BARZILAY: I think you raised up a  
11 very good point. When I started in the '90s, police  
12 went on the majority of our calls with us. It was a  
13 deterrent when they see the police officer on scene.  
14 As the years progressed, there's less and less police  
15 response to EMS calls. B-HEARD is a perfect example.  
16 They don't go on mental health calls with us. These  
17 people are unstable. Yes, as we see less and less  
18 police force out there, the public gets bolder, and  
19 the assaults will go up.

20           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right, and many of  
21 my Colleagues don't even want the police to respond  
22 to emotionally disturbed individuals, but you don't  
23 know what you're going to get, you have no idea. If  
24 somebody's emotionally disturbed, you don't know if  
25 they're going to get violent at any second, and

2 you've seen that, and your men and women have seen  
3 that on a regular basis.

4 OREN BARZILAY: That's correct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: We do have a lot  
6 more people on the street that are emotionally  
7 disturbed, not only on our subways but walking  
8 around. We all see it as New Yorkers. You're seeing  
9 it on the front lines so that's why the City needs to  
10 respond to this, and not only just have EMS show up,  
11 you need backup, you need a police officer there, and  
12 that's why I think we all have to, and I'm against  
13 cutting police academy classes obviously, and  
14 recruiting more in your area because you need backup,  
15 and many times it's not the police. Maybe you need  
16 another EMS to backup you so that's a situation I  
17 think, like I said, it's going to get worse before it  
18 gets better.

19 Thank you, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Any other questions  
21 from our Council Members?

22 No?

23 Oren, thank you for your testimony and  
24 thank you for being the strongest advocate for your  
25 union. They are very lucky to have you, and we're

2 lucky to be able to partner with you and learn from  
3 you and introduce legislation that's much needed  
4 because of our discussions, and we hope that  
5 continues. Thank you.

6 OREN BARZILAY: I appreciate it. Thank  
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ARIOLA: Is there anyone else  
9 from the public that wanted to testify that may not  
10 have signed in?

11 Okay, seeing that there aren't any, I  
12 just would like to thank our Staff, our Committee  
13 Counsel, Josh Kingsley, our Senior Policy Analyst  
14 Will Hongach who's right here beside me, and Phyllis  
15 Inserillo, my amazing Chief-of-Staff, who put all  
16 these things together and makes everybody at this  
17 table look good. Thank you to the Committee Members  
18 and to those who testified. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date December 1, 2023