



May 17, 2023

Testimony of Commissioner Laura Kavanagh

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Good afternoon Chair Ariola, Chair Brannan, and all Council Members present. My name is Laura Kavanagh and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Fire Department. I am joined today by Joseph Pfeifer, First Deputy Commissioner; John Hodgins, Chief of Department; Michael Fields, Chief of EMS; Lizette Christoff, Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget; and Nafeesah Noonan, Assistant Commissioner for Recruitment and Retention. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the executive budget for the Fire Department.

Before I address the budget, I'd like to acknowledge two special members of the FDNY family and an act of heroism that took place since we last spoke. Cesar Reyes and Elijah Houston are seniors at FDNY Captain Vernon A. Richard High School. While walking to school a few weeks ago, they stopped by a friend's house and encountered the friend's father on the kitchen floor, unresponsive and gasping for air. Cesar had taken an FDNY Prep Course as part of his school curriculum, so he knew what to do and sprang into action. Finding no pulse, he immediately called 911 and began performing chest compressions. Elijah guided the responding EMTs and Paramedics into the house and talked the family through the situation, keeping them calm. Together, Cesar and Elijah saved the life of their friend's father.

In our Preliminary Budget Hearing, I highlighted the work of FDNY's Mobile CPR outreach unit. The situation that Cesar and Elijah found themselves in shows just how valuable it is to know CPR. Being prepared may enable you to save the life of a stranger or a loved one. The Department offers free CPR courses in multiple languages, and we encourage everyone to enroll.

I am also pleased to report today, three FDNY firefighters were honored by President Biden at the White House for acts of heroism. Retired Lieutenant Jason Hickey, Lieutenant Justin Hespeler, and Firefighter Patrick Thornton each received the Medal of Valor this morning in connection with acts of heroism involving, respectively, a rescue of an individual in the Harlem River; a rescue of a newborn baby from a fire; and a rescue of an individual who was trapped beneath a capsized boat. Every day, FDNY members make us proud.

The Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 24 is a reflection for Mayor Adams' ongoing support for public safety. Among new needs, it provides nearly \$27 million in funding for FDNY's role in the Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (BHEARD) program. BHEARD pairs FDNY EMTs and paramedics with mental health professionals to respond to mental health calls that come in through the 911 system. These teams respond to a wide range of behavioral health problems, such as suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and mental health conditions including serious mental illness. Team members bring significant experience with mental health crises and have undergone joint training to respond to and de-escalate emergency situations. This budget funds the program's operations in existing areas and its expansion into additional high-needs neighborhoods.

It also includes funding for two Basic Life Support ambulances tours that the Department is absorbing that were previously operated by Kingsbrook Jewish hospital in Brooklyn. Other funding in the Executive Budget covers Personnel Service (PS) and Other Than Personnel Service (OTPS) adjustments for FY23, including funding to support updated spending projections for uniform overtime spending as well as auto parts and telecommunications services costs.

The Executive budget reflects the Fire Department's steps to meet obligations under the Program to Eliminate the Gap, or PEG. These measures include decreased contractual spending and additional Medicare revenue generated by EMS transports.

I will close by addressing a topic that is a top focus of the Fire Department and the Council. The trend of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries continues to wreak havoc on our city. This past week, the number of deaths caused by these fires in 2023 surpassed the total number of deaths caused by lithium-ion battery fires in 2022. We are still encountering residents leaving unattended batteries to charge overnight, batteries and vehicles left blocking their only way of egress, and locations where large numbers of batteries are present. We continue to see fires resulting from micro-mobility devices and we are engaged in a comprehensive information campaign to warn New Yorkers about the dangers of these fires and best practices to stay safe. As a city and as a Department, we are attacking this problem at every level from Mayor Adams's "Charge Safe, Ride Safe" Electric Micromobility Action Plan to working with state and local representatives, members of Congress, and an ongoing dialogue and engagement with the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission. These efforts will be effective over time, but we know that there are unsafe devices in the hands of our citizens right now, so we are doing everything we can to mitigate potential dangers. We have developed and released new Public Service Announcements and safety

materials. We continue amplifying our outreach to the community. Many of you have shared those messages and we thank the Council for your efforts and cooperation in helping to spread the word. Working together, we can make a difference on this critical threat.

I would be glad to take your questions at this time.