



November 28, 2023
Testimony of Chief Michael Fields, FDNY
“Legislative Hearing – Introductions 138, 903 & 904”

Good morning Chair Ariola, members of the Fire & Emergency Management Committee, and the sponsors of today’s legislation. My name is Michael Fields and I am Chief of Emergency Medical Services at the New York City Fire Department. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about legislation being considered by the City Council.

Introduction 903

Introduction 903 would require the Fire Department to provide body armor to all Emergency Medical Services (EMS) members. Under the legislation, the body armor shall meet a ballistic resistance or stab resistance standard of the national institute of justice or any successor standard. No employee shall be permitted to retain the body armor after leaving the Fire Department or moving to a position that does not involve the provision of emergency medical services.

The Fire Department currently makes ballistic vests available to all EMS members. Each new member is fitted for a vest upon leaving the EMS Academy. Replacement vests are made available every five years.

The safety of EMS members is paramount. We agree with and are supportive of this legislation.

Introduction 138

Introduction 138 would require the Fire Department to provide vehicle insurance, access to medical supplies, and ambulance driver training for volunteer ambulance services. Volunteer companies operate outside of the FDNY and, generally speaking, do not participate in the 911 system. We have great admiration for the volunteers who operate these services and the work that they perform. Some volunteer companies have even stepped up to provide support to the Department during extraordinary circumstances, such as during the Covid pandemic, and we are grateful for that.

From a fiscal standpoint, the requirements of this legislation would be very challenging to fulfill. By our calculation, there are approximately thirty volunteer ambulance services operating in New York City. They are of various sizes; some operate consistently and some may only operate on certain days of the week or when volunteers are available. The initial cost to outfit a Basic Life Support ambulance with supplies is approximately \$80,000. This includes “hard” equipment such as defibrillators, splints, boards, and scoops, as well as “soft” equipment such as bandages and oxygen masks. That cost increases to approximately \$125,000 for an Advanced Life Support ambulance, which is used for responses to more acute calls. There are additional costs to maintain appropriate levels as supplies are used in the field.

Providing driver training for volunteer companies would also be costly, as well as operationally challenging. The EMS Academy on Fort Totten is used for incoming classes of EMTs as well as for refresher courses, training for members to maintain certifications, and advanced instruction

for paramedics and EMS officers. As the Committee is aware, we have expanded our Fort Totten facilities in recent years to better accommodate larger EMS classes and training. Using FDNY facilities to provide the training of all volunteer drivers in New York City will displace FDNY personnel training and necessitate increased overtime for instructors.

Finally, obtaining insurance policies for volunteer ambulances would be extremely costly, particularly since the City of New York is self-insured and the FDNY does not operate under vehicle insurance. Extending this benefit to volunteer companies would create a liability for the City and for taxpayers. This would be a questionable use of resources, given that the Department does not monitor volunteer drivers, has no insight into their operations or ongoing activities, and has no way of incentivizing or enforcing safe operations. The New York City Law Department also has concerns about potential liabilities associated with this legislation.

Though we value the work of volunteer companies and the women and men who volunteer their time to serve their neighbors, it would be extraordinarily difficult for the Fire Department to comply with Introduction 138 if it were to become law.

Introduction 904

Introduction 904 would require the Fire Department to develop de-escalation and self-defense training for all Emergency Medical Services employees. The training would be required to address the unique characteristics and operations of emergency medical services with a particular focus on violent situations in the context of patient care. It should include recognition and understanding of mental illness and distress, effective communication skills, conflict de-

escalation techniques, and self-defense techniques. The Department would be required to offer this training no less frequently than once per calendar year.

I mentioned this point earlier, but it bears repeating: the Fire Department values the safety of our members above all else. In the past five years, we have experienced tragedy twice, losing two EMS members to violence that they experienced while on duty.

De-escalation and self-defense training is necessary and the Department does provide this type of training. EMS members participate in a twelve-hour training regimen that is conducted in partnership with New York City Health & Hospitals. The program is focused on situational awareness, de-escalation techniques, managing patients who are experiencing a mental health crisis, and patients who are potentially violent. In addition, members receive instruction on contacting others for assistance during an escalating situation or emergency, including communicating with law enforcement.

The training that we provide now does not comply with the provision of Introduction 904 that would require it to be offered annually. However, the Department does offer a portion of that training on the Learning Management System, which is available in all EMS stations at any time. We are always exploring ways to make our members safer, so we are happy to continue engaging with the Council to develop a version of this legislation that is satisfactory for all.

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

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TESTIMONY OF OREN BARZILAY, PRESIDENT FDNY EMS, LOCAL 2507 November 28, 2023

Good morning, Committee Chairpersons, and Honorable Councilmembers.

My name is Oren Barzilay. I'm a 25-year veteran of the FDNY EMS and I am President of EMS Local 2507. I am here today to speak on behalf of more than 4,000 Uniformed FDNY EMTs, Paramedics & Fire Inspectors.

New York's EMTs serve in the most renowned fire department in the country, perhaps one of the most renowned in the entire world. And they are tasked with responding to an incredible number of emergencies each year.

In 2022, EMS responded to 1,580,871 medical emergencies, and according to the Mayor's office, this is a 100,000 increase from 2021.

At its current pace, EMS is expected to respond to over 1.6 million medical calls by the end of 2023, again surpassing the previous year.

I am here today to spotlight very considerable issues for our city's EMTs, who despite their pivotal role in serving and protecting New Yorkers, we are horrifically supported with resources from our city government.

EMT assaults are at an all-time high, doubling in the last year and many hundreds of members are not even reporting them due to a lack of any action at all by both the Department, the city, and the judicial system.

When we arrive at the scene of an emergency, we don't carry guns like NYPD has. We don't have axes like our FDNY Firefighter brethren. We roll up to the scene of an emergency with a doctor's bag to provide medical care.

What is the city going to do to fix this crisis?

I urge this committee to pass legislation so that all EMTs or paramedics are not left alone in the back of ambulances. It must be mandated for the FDNY to require a three-man crew in an ambulance, this way no one is ever left

alone. Furthermore, all of our supervisors respond on their own without any additional resources, and they need to have an aide as well.

If you faced such a high chance of getting assaulted in your workplace, it's an employer's responsibility to keep the workforce safe. That protection of our members is absolutely not happening right now.

Perhaps it is time that the city designates EMTs and paramedics as peace officers.

EMS is being totally and completely starved of necessary resources to allow us to work safely and protect this city's citizens at the same time.

Right now, the FDNY is providing body armor and ballistic vests on a voluntary basis. The tragic uptick in stories about EMTs and paramedics being brutally assaulted is worrying.

That is why we need a guaranteed permanent five year replacement policy in the provisions of body armor.

We feel strongly about keeping our members prepared for any situation or scenario, even in the case they are faced with danger. The FDNY's de-escalation and self-defense training course for emergency first responders is a good step of members.

However, it is clear to us that given the frequency of assaults on our members, this training needs to be more than just one and done. It needs to be mandatory yearly training.

This brings up the topic of community-based volunteer ambulance companies and their relationship with private hospitals.

Private hospitals want the city of New York to pay for these voluntary services. These hospitals are supposed to be responsible for dispatch fees but are not paying a dime.

Volunteer companies provide a valuable service, but the city should start requiring private hospitals to pay those fees. Currently, the city pays for the mobile data terminals that all ambulances must have on board.

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

The alarming trend of surging assaults is causing members to leave the Department altogether to find work that is safer and also pays more.

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

Thank You all for your time and consideration.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

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I represent: FDNY

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Name: DREN BARZILAY

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I represent: FDNY EMS LOCAL 2507

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