



**Testimony of Joseph J. Esposito  
Commissioner  
New York City Department of Emergency Management  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Fire and Emergency Management  
March 8, 2018**

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Good afternoon Chairperson Borelli and members of the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management. I am Joe Esposito, Commissioner of New York City Department of Emergency Management, and I am happy to be here to talk about our fiscal year 2019 budget.

We have had a busy year. In 2017, we activated the Emergency Operations Center 14 times for a total of 107 days. That includes five winter weather events, two building vacates due to fires, two flash floods, an active shooter at Bronx Lebanon hospital, a heat emergency, the Port Authority explosion, and Hurricanes Jose and Maria. During extreme weather events, we held citywide calls for elected officials and continuously sent out notifications for localized incidents in specific districts.

We were activated for 73 days for Hurricane Maria and, during that time, helped coordinate the operation of a Hurricane Reception Center at the Julia De Burgos Latino Cultural Center that assisted more than 2,000 households. We deployed 299 City staff to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to assist in recovery operations. In addition, the New York City Urban Search and Rescue Team deployed 190 members to Texas and Puerto Rico over the course of three hurricanes to assist in water rescues, evacuation, and wellness checks. The team brought in food, water and medical supplies, as well as repaired generators for two hospitals in isolated areas of Puerto Rico.

In 2017, we monitored 3,067 incidents and sent our citywide incident coordinators to 759 incidents. Notify NYC sent out more than 1,500 messages. In September, we launched the Notify NYC mobile application which had over 48,000 downloads in three months; this, in addition to growth in our traditional subscribership put us over 700,000 registrants as of yesterday. We held or participated in 91 interagency exercises to make sure plans are understood and necessary protocols for plans are ready to be implemented as needed.

Our community outreach and engagement activities continue to grow, and you have likely seen us in your neighborhood at meetings, town halls, fairs, mobile office hours and other community events. In total, we participated in 932 Ready NY events with more than 110,000 people attending and distributed more than one million emergency planning guides. We graduated twelve new classes of CERT volunteers, taking our totals to almost 1,300 volunteers throughout the city. We hosted a disaster volunteer conference in June and a Disabilities, Access and Functional Needs Symposium in December. We also engaged 40 community partners in creating their own plans using our Community Emergency Planning Toolkit and also hosted an Immigrant Heritage Week breakfast with over 80 immigrant community leaders in attendance.

We continue to look ahead to find new ways to prepare the city and our citizens for the next emergency. With that, let me now provide a snapshot of our budget for next year.

Our projected total Fiscal Year 2019 City Tax Levy expense budget is \$26.3 million. We rely on our City tax levy expense budget to support the majority of the agency's administrative, technological and operational costs.

The projected Fiscal Year 2019 Personnel Services budget is \$5.7 million, which supports the 61 personnel lines paid directly through our tax levy-funds. This includes \$1.4 million in funding for 18 staff members dedicated to working on increasing communication and services to people with access and functional needs. Our other staffing is supported through grant funds and personnel on assignment from multiple City agencies.

Our projected Fiscal Year 2019 Other Than Personnel Services budget is \$20.6 million, which covers all agency operating and administrative costs. There is virtually no discretionary funding in this budget. These funds are designated to cover our warehouse lease, utilities, and telecommunications costs including the maintenance and operations of our Emergency Operations Center and back-up facilities. This money also supports our fleet and all additional equipment, supplies and materials needed to run the agency.

The agency receives grant funding to support many of our core programs. In the past year, we secured \$25 million in federal funding, primarily through the Urban Areas Security Initiative grant. This funding is vital to our ability to run many of our finest initiatives, including the Ready New York public education program, Community Emergency Response Team program, Continuity of Operations Program, Geographic Information Systems, Training and Exercises, Watch Command and Response, and Citywide Incident Management Systems planning, and the Emergency Supply Stockpile. We work with City Hall, OMB, the City's Congressional delegation and our partner agencies to push for full homeland security funding in future years; this money supports critical operations within ours and several other agencies' budgets and is critical to the City.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to continue working with the Council on issues pertaining to emergency preparedness and response. I am happy to take your questions.



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Good morning Chair Borelli and all of the Council Members present. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2019 for the Fire Department. I am joined this morning by First Deputy Commissioner Laura Kavanaugh, Chief of Department James Leonard, Chief of EMS James Booth, and Assistant Commissioner for Budget and Finance Stephen Rush.

A year ago, I was able to report that fire deaths for the previous year were at an all-time low. In 2017, however, the City saw an increase to 73 fire deaths. In the month of December alone, 26 people died in fires – the worst month for fire deaths in more than a quarter century. Part of the reason that fire deaths increased last year was that three serious fires took the lives of 22 people. We know that every fire death is a tragedy, and we mourn for the family and friends of the victims. I want to reassure the Council and the people of New York that fire trends over the last decade are encouraging, and that fires have been decreasing in general. In 2017, New York experienced an 8% decline in serious fires from 2016 and a 15.5% decline from 2015. That's a difference of 400 fewer serious fires in 2 years. Though it is painful to suffer 73 deaths, we have come a long way since my first year in the Department, 1970, in which the City experienced 310 fire fatalities. Numbers like that are a thing of the past.

Medical incidents were up in every borough in calendar year 2017, and the total number of incidents responded to by the Department was over 1.7 million. Despite those increases, citywide response times for ambulances to life threatening medical emergencies were faster by seven seconds, including 25 seconds faster in the borough of Queens.

In other ways, 2017 was a very positive year for the Department. I've previously detailed for this committee the tremendous gains that we made in our recent recruitment campaign. 46,000 candidates took the firefighter exam – more than any previous exam. A majority of test-takers were people of color, which is also something that has never happened before. More than twice as many women took the exam in 2017 than had taken the previous exam. The number of Asian test takers increased by 55%; black test takers increased by 39%; Latino test takers increased by 29%; Native American test takers increased by 35%; and the number of female test takers who took the exam improved by 115%. We have strengthened our systematic engagement with candidates who have taken the test in order to turn these positive recruiting numbers into positive appointment numbers.

2017 was also a very strong year for the Department's outreach and community engagement. The Fire Safety Education unit held more than 8,000 fire safety events, providing information and educating 700,000 New Yorkers about fire prevention and





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lifesaving strategies. Many of these were seasonal events in advance of celebrations including but not limited to Halloween, Christmas, Chanukah, Lunar New Year, Labor Day, and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Others were provided at block parties, fairs, in school classrooms, and in conjunction with community group events. Some were conducted in response to high profile fire incidents. The unit disseminates a wide variety of information on various fire safety topics including kitchen and cooking safety, planning an escape, the importance of maintaining working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, information focused on children, candle safety, electrical safety, safety tips for seniors, and understanding whether an individual's building is fireproof vs. non-fireproof and how to react accordingly during a fire. Our Mobile CPR Training unit trained 24,000 New Yorkers to perform Bystander CPR, including more than 17,000 high school students.

In 2017, we collaborated with several of our fellow city agencies to provide fire safety education, including the Department for the Aging, the Department of Education, the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and NYCHA, and we will continue working with those agencies this year. We are also especially excited about our upcoming partnership with New York City Emergency Management which will produce several fire safety megaevents in neighborhoods that we are targeting for enhanced fire safety outreach.

In addition to aggressively pursuing fire prevention through public outreach, we also continue to improve our risk-based approach to inspections, identifying buildings that are at greatest risk of serious fires so that we can mitigate that risk. I had our analytics team of data scientists undertake a year-long effort to develop an enhanced and dynamic approach to modeling fire risk across the 1.1 million buildings in New York City. Our new risk model builds significantly on our original risk-based inspection model, which was deployed citywide in 2013 but was largely limited to using data from *static* variables -- such as building type; age; and number of floors. Our enhanced 2018 version of our risk model incorporates *dynamic* variables from both the Department's data as well as from outside sources.

We evaluated more than 500 different variables, and identified 50 that served as reliable indicators to predict risk of a major fire. We identified variables that provided clues about the structural integrity of a building – the number of reports of gas or water leaks; electrical incidents; or automatic false alarms. We looked at whether a building had a previous fire history. We looked at our EMS data, and found a correlation between buildings with a high number of life-threatening medical emergencies and buildings at greater risk of a major fire that could lead to civilian injuries or deaths. And we looked at





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behavioral factors, such as 311 complaints for dirty conditions, noise, or heat problems – which were good proxies for buildings that were at a higher risk of a major fire.

We then utilized modern “deep learning” software, which can recognize patterns in sets of variables and calculate probabilities of outputs – the same software used in predictive applications such as facial recognition. We combined the results into a risk algorithm that narrowed the universe of buildings that we’ll put on the top of our list for fire safety outreach to about eight percent of all buildings – a number that we can realistically reach. We’re confident that this targeted focus will improve our ability to drive down the risk of a major fire with the continued help of all New Yorkers. We’ll begin testing this new approach later this month.

As we enter the second term under Mayor de Blasio and under my administration at the Fire Department, I want to draw the attention of the Council to the major investments that we have made in the area of Emergency Medical Services. Since 2014, the Department has added 186 ambulance tours, either by adding new ones or taking over tours that were previously operated by private institutions. We’ve added ambulance units in every borough, including a large number of units in areas that were experiencing longer response times, such as western Queens and the Bronx. We created Tactical Response Groups, deploying roving additional units in Queens and the Bronx based on hourly response data so that we can attack growing needs with increased resources in real time. We piloted and then received ongoing budget funding for the Fly Car program in the Bronx, which moves our highly-qualified Advanced Life Support resources into non-transport fly cars. The budget funding enables us to continue to operate these ambulances as additional Basic Life Support units, staffed by EMTs. This allows us to send both a BLS and an ALS resource to individuals experiencing life-threatening emergencies and frees up the ALS resources faster so that they can respond to other emergencies.

We added 150 additional dispatchers to support Emergency Medical Dispatch; automated the questions that we ask callers reporting medical emergencies with our state-of-the-art computerized triage program; and stationed two ambulance units on Rikers Island, dramatically reducing the amount of time it takes to service calls on the island and also reducing response times in northwest Queens by more than 40 seconds. We also launched a hospital liaison program to reduce turnaround times at hospitals so that we get our ambulance crews back out more quickly to take the next call, and we’ve begun rolling out ASAP vehicles, giving us additional flexibility in responding to calls. Through the great support of the de Blasio administration, we’ve been able to evaluate and improve all facets of how the Department conducts emergency medical services, from call-processing and dispatching to travel time and ambulance availability. We added EMTs, paramedics,





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officers, and training and support staff, and we increased the hardware and apparatus to support all of these programs, including acquiring a large number of new ambulances, tablets, and other equipment.

We will continue making investments in EMS in FY19. Included in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget are 15 positions for staffing 3 Basic Life Support ambulance tours that were previously operated by NY Community Hospital. It also continues baseline funding for the Fly Car program in the Bronx, which was initially funded only as a pilot.

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 19 also includes a variety of critical investments in other areas as well. 1.6 million dollars is allocated for Fire Prevention programs, and 1.3 million dollars is allocated for Bureau of Technology projects. The budget continues to support our diversity goals by providing funding for an additional Equal Employment Opportunity attorney and an additional staffer to enhance our focus on contracting with Minority and Women owned Business Enterprise-eligible firms.

One aspect of the Mayor's Preliminary Budget that the Council may be particularly interested in is the funding provided for 36 new positions for a Joint Operations Center at PSAC II - the Public Safety Answering Center in the Bronx - where the NYPD and the FDNY take emergency calls. The Joint Operations Center was conceived of in order to improve response times and other performance metrics by enhancing communication and increasing supervisory capacity to strengthen the coordination between Fire and EMS during emergency responses. We expect the Joint Operations Center to facilitate better load-balancing during periods of increased call volume. It will also provide close monitoring that will allow for better identification and mitigation of calls that incur longer response times. The effect will be enhanced real time monitoring and improved quality assurance of personnel and processing so that we can provide better service to the public and save more lives, which is always our ultimate goal.

Later this year, we will be launching the EMT Trainee program, which will provide an entry level opportunity for New York City residents interested in pursuing careers in Emergency Medical Service. The Department generally hires individuals who have already obtained their EMT certification, but in this program, we will be hiring individuals and conducting all of the training ourselves. EMT Trainees will participate in a 16 week program designed to prepare them to pass the New York State EMT exam and become FDNY EMTs. These trainees will be hired from a civil service list, and while the first class will not be chosen until this summer, we know that the list itself is diverse, including 35% African American candidates and 35% women.





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Finally, in light of recent school shootings and similar incidents, I want to brief you on the status of our Rescue Task Force. Each Rescue Task Force team is made up of twenty-nine first responders that have received specialized training to triage, treat, and transport victims during an Active Shooter incident or Mass Casualty Incident (MCI). They are also proactively deployed at high profile events such as New Year's in Times Square and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The Rescue Task Force's job is to work alongside the NYPD – who provide force protection – to operate in a warm zone to stop the bleeding and save lives. Each member of the team is outfitted with ballistic protective equipment to protect them during the response. Members have also completed hands-on training to apply tourniquets and combat gauze to stop bleeding. They have participated in full scale exercises with NYPD's Strategic Response Group to practice responding to an MCI. More than 1700 FDNY members have undergone the training to become members of the Rescue Task Force.

The idea for the Task Force has been in development for a few years, but we accelerated its development after the attacks in Paris in 2015. Senior members of the Department studied incidents as far back as the Columbine High School shooting to learn the best ways for us to be effective in the field. Recent incidents to which the Rescue Task Force has been deployed include the Port Authority bombing, the Chelsea bombing, the active shooter at Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center, and the truck attack that took place in October of last year.

The existence of the Rescue Task Force is a good reminder that a modern fire department faces a wide range of challenges, from the traditional notion of fighting fires, to responding to medical calls, to a large variety of other ways that we are called upon to protect members of the community. With the support of Mayor de Blasio, and the partnership of the City Council, we take pride in our mission to serve the people of New York City.

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



March 8, 2018

**Memorandum in Support of Increased Funding for Additional New York City Fire Department (FDNY) fire alarm and central station inspectors in the FY 2018 Budget**

On behalf of the New York Electrical Contractors Association (NYECA), the leading association of union electrical contractors in New York City, we respectfully request additional funding in the New York City Fiscal Year 2019 budget to allow for the hiring of additional New York City Fire Department (FDNY) fire alarm and central station inspectors.

On March 21, 2017, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed Int. 0247-A-2014 into law. This beneficial new law increased civil and criminal penalties for performing unlicensed electrical work. The law enhances public safety by acting as a strong disincentive for unqualified individuals attempting to perform such work. However, in order to prevent such potentially hazardous work and facilitate fire alarm inspections of legal construction work in progress, the City must fund a sufficient number of both Department of Buildings (DOB) electrical inspectors to ensure all electrical workers are properly licensed, and FDNY field inspectors to address the growing backlog in fire alarm and central station inspections.

Fortunately, the DOB has succeeded in improving its number of electrical inspectors on the job. There are now, 300 DOB inspectors in the field making sure our city is safe, of which 80 are dedicated electrical inspectors working in all five boroughs. However, the present, total number of FDNY field inspectors is 20, for the entire City. Meanwhile, demand for fire inspections is extremely high due to the robust construction market in New York City, and keeps escalating. And fire alarm inspections, which are required for the granting of a Certificate of Occupancy (CO), are becoming increasingly complex due to the nature of building patterns in all five boroughs. This complexity and increasing construction volume greatly increases the man hours required for initial fire inspections, and also increases the amount of time to re-inspect for the granting of a final CO. The situation becomes even more acute during the summer months, when there is a rush to complete school construction projects by the fall.



The inadequate number of FDNY field inspectors not only slows down construction jobs by causing a backlog in required inspections, resulting in the increasing issuance of Temporary COs: it's also a potential matter of public safety, as work is being done without proper, timely fire inspections. The problem is alarming, but the solution is simple: we need more FDNY fire inspectors. Ideally, based on our estimates, there should be at least 80 FDNY field inspectors on the job at all times.

Accordingly, NYECA requests adequate funding in the New York City Fiscal Year 2019 Budget that would allow for the hiring of additional FDNY fire alarm and central station inspectors.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the New York Electrical Contractors Association.

THE NEW YORK ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

**THE COUNCIL  
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Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/8/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vincent Variale EMS Officer FDNY

Address: 125 Barclay St NY NY 10007

I represent: Uniformed EMS Officers FDNY

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

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Name: Michael Greco EMS EMT, Paramedic, Fire Inspector

Address: 150-39 14 AVE Inspiration

I represent: Local 2507

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

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/9/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Laura Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner

Address: 9 Mott St

I represent: FDNY

Address: 9 Mott St

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Name: James Booth, Chief of EMS

Address: 9 Metrotech

I represent: FDNY

Address: 9 Metrotech

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Name: James Keenan, Chief of Dept of Fire Commissioner

Address: 9 Metrotech

I represent: FDNY

Address: 9 Metrotech

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Name: Daniel Nigro, Fire Commissioner

Address: 9 Metrotech

I represent: FDNY

Address: 9 Metrotech

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Name: Stephen Bruch, Commissioner for Budget

Address: 4 Metrotech

I represent: FDNY

Address: 4 Metrotech

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Name: Branch Strickland

Address: Director of Finance

I represent: NYCEM

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

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Name: Christina Farrell

Address: Deputy Commissioner

I represent: NYCEM

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



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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CARL GANDOLFO

Address: 80 CHARLES AVE

I represent: LOCAL 2507 FDNY EMT'S, PARAMEDICS

Address: 150-39 14TH AVE WILHELMINE, NY

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Esposito

Address: Commissioner

I represent: NYCEM

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

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