



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE COMMITTEE ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT - OVERSIGHT
HEARING
JUNE 11, 2020**

Good Morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you to the Chair Joe Borelli for holding this hearing on the potential of a second wave of the coronavirus that may occur in our City.

We are currently entering a period of reopening, and it is important that the City navigates this in a careful manner that prioritizes the health of people. Let me reiterate what I have said before. The response from the Governor and the Mayor was late, which affected our ability to contain the virus. I fear, if a second wave were to occur, we would only know what not to do rather than what needs to be done. There was a human cost to hesitation and that human cost was the high infection rates and fatalities in communities of more color.

Therefore, it is vital for our emergency systems to be prepared. We need emergency plans that include the input of communities of more color. My office, for example, is pushing city agencies, including those present today, to provide guidelines for businesses to safely reopen. As highlighted in previous hearings, we are entering both hurricane season as well as a period of potential heat waves. These two alone may cause disparities in our City. We already heard that the New York City Emergency Management identified 80 of the almost 500 cooling centers from last year that are suitable for this summer. If we do not have additional contingency plans, vulnerable populations may be excluded and gravely affected in a second wave. We need to be proactive and minimize disparities whenever possible.

We cannot forget the people who work in our emergency systems as well. Emergency Medical Services workers, who should be noted are still waiting for pay parity with firefighters and officers, were overwhelmed with cases. Back in March, calls to 911 were at levels not seen since the September 11th attacks. At one point, there was a new call every 15.5 seconds. This took a heavy emotional and physical toll on emergency medical technicians and paramedics. Indeed, we should be vigilant about the lasting psychological effects such as traumatic stress. I anticipate officials from the Fire Department of New York will discuss plans on providing health services for their employees.



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It also raises the question, should a second wave occur, whether we are prepared to equip workers with what they need. Workers were caught by surprise, raising the question as to whether the City ever crafted detailed, in-depth plans for a pandemic. While it may not happen, we cannot have a repeat of our frontline workers lacking masks and other PPE they need for their job. When the City is unprepared, it is the people on the frontlines who are exposed and put at a significant disadvantage when helping New Yorkers. We do not want hundreds, if not thousands of City employees to get COVID-19 again.

In addition, the crisis affected another population too often forgotten in our society: people who are disabled. Consider the case of our Governor who waited weeks to have an ASL translator at his public hearings. Consider people with a hearing impairment visiting hospitals that do not have accessible masks. Consider the initial inaccessibility of absentee ballots until the state amended them after a lawsuit. We need emergency plans that are accessible to all New Yorkers.

That is why I am glad text-to-911 is active, but I am concerned that officials from the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications are not here to contribute to this discussion. In fact, it may be news for people as it became quietly active. We heard concerns, various times, in the May 1st hearing about text-to-911, but not having the main designers here worries me about a feature that was long overdue in our City. The City should actively promote it at every opportunity for people enduring domestic violence and people unable to phone 911.

Finally, I want to focus on the City's response in the first wave. It relied too much on policing for social enforcement, which notably led to disparity in arrests and summonses. I anticipate this will not be considered for the second wave, especially with what we have seen over the past week or so. People now are frightened about returning to work, and we need answers to reassure people to minimize the risk of contagion.

This is why the City must be prepared for a second wave of COVID-19. We need clear information for New Yorkers on what the plan must be. The plan must prioritize the health and safety of New Yorkers. We need health officials from Health and Hospitals and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene leading the call. Thank you to the chair for allowing me to speak today, and I anticipate testimony from the agency officials on this important topic.

Testimony of New York Coalition of Code Consultants (NYCCC) regarding Introduction 1841

June 11, 2020

Good morning Chairman Borelli and Members of the New York City Council Committee on Fire and Emergency Management. My name is Laura Rothrock and I am providing testimony on behalf of the New York Coalition of Code Consultants, also known as NYCCC. NYCCC is a non-profit trade organization whose members specialize in securing construction and development approvals from municipal agencies, as well as building code and zoning consulting. I am testifying today in support of Intro 1841, which would require the Fire Department to issue reports on the Department's Fire Alarm Inspection Unit.

NYCCC member companies work very closely with the FDNY Fire Alarm Inspection Unit, and other units within the FDNY, to ensure compliance and safety in New York City's buildings. As an organization, we have had regular discussions with FDNY to share industry feedback and discuss ways in which FDNY and industry partners can work together more efficiently without compromising safety.

FDNY has been a collaborative partner to the industry and receptive to our recommendations, but the agency is lacking critical resources and staff to perform their essential functions. It is our understanding that the delays in fire alarm inspections are due to the need for additional technical staff within the unit, compounded by a growing number of new applications.

With the COVID-19 crisis impacting City funding across the board, we fear that the resource problem of the FDNY will only be compounded further. Even though the construction industry is getting back to work, the FDNY's lack of resources can hinder our economic rebound in a meaningful way.

While we understand this bill will not solve the critical funding issue that needs to be addressed, NYCCC supports this bill as a step in the right direction for more transparency. However, we suggest the Council amend the bill to include reporting on fire alarm plan examinations as well. Plan examination is a crucial process for building occupancy to occur. Recently, FDNY absorbed all of the plan review responsibilities previously managed in part by the Department of Buildings, significantly increasing FDNY's burden. The wait time for plan review is 40 days and if there are any objections, a second review takes 40 more days and so on.

Our hope is that FDNY can provide City Council with data on an ongoing basis, not in a manner that is an administrative burden for the agency, but so that data can inform the important funding decisions of this body.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

TESTIMONY OF THE REAL ESTATE BOARD OF NEW YORK BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FIRE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ON INTRO 1841-2020

June 11, 2020

The Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) is the City's leading real estate trade association representing commercial, residential, and institutional property owners, builders, managers, investors, brokers, salespeople, and other organizations and individuals active in New York City real estate. REBNY thanks the Council for the opportunity to testify on legislation that requires the New York Fire Department (FDNY) to create a report on its fire alarm inspection unit.

BILL: Intro 1841-2020

SUBJECT: A Local Law in relation to requiring the fire department to report on the department's fire alarm inspection unit.

SPONSORS: Council Members Borelli and Powers

Int 1841 would require FDNY to report on the staffing level of its fire alarm inspection unit and the number of fire alarm inspections conducted disaggregated by borough and inspection type. In addition, the bill requires FDNY to report on the average time to schedule an inspection after receiving an application, the average time between receipt of the application for an inspection and the date of the inspection, as well as the time it takes to process supporting documents.

Fire prevention systems are essential to public safety, and REBNY appreciates the critical role FDNY plays in reviewing, approving, and inspecting the operation of these systems. At the same time, we support the Council's call for collecting and publishing data on the fire prevention unit's operations as our members routinely experience significant delays in their projects as a result of significant wait times for the FDNY to review plans and conduct inspections. Disclosing more information about the unit's staffing, workload, and processing time will help FDNY, the Council, and the public identify ways to improve operations, reducing the amount of time it takes to process these application and inspections.

Thank you for the consideration of these points.

CONTACT:

Zachary Steinberg
Vice President
Policy & Planning
Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY)
(212) 616-5227
zsteinberg@rebny.com