

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



FY27 Budget Oversight Hearing on

Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department

Testimony of
John A. Donnelly, Sr.
Fire and EMS Chief

Before the
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Chairperson

May 6, 2026
John A. Wilson Building, Room 500

Good morning/afternoon, Chairperson Pinto, members of the Council, and staff. I am John Donnelly, Chief of the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Mayor Muriel Bowser's Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) proposed budget.

For those watching from home, my testimony is available on our website at [FEMS.DC.gov](https://fems.dc.gov).

As we begin this budget conversation, it's important to understand the broader context shaping the District's financial position this year. Mayor Bowser's proposed FY27 Budget, Grow DC, was formulated with three key considerations in mind: how to drive growth in our economy to fund the services and programs residents count on, how to keep families in DC and attract new residents, and how to create a business environment that draws new investment and creates new jobs. We are navigating a pivotal moment that demands a more deliberate approach to growth. The federal dollars that once expanded our programs in unprecedented ways have been exhausted, and federal workforce reductions have introduced new pressures on our economy and commercial corridors. That being said, it's important to be clear: DC is still growing. Revenues have slowed, but the city maintains a strong financial foundation on which we can build by making the kinds of strategic and targeted decisions that will allow DC to continue growing while delivering the high-quality services our residents depend on.

With that framework in mind, I want to highlight the incredible progress and transformation DC Fire and EMS has made during the Mayor's administration. Our accomplishments reflect not only strong investment but the incredibly hard work of our dedicated workforce.

We have **more than doubled our cardiac arrest survival rate**, reaching **44.3% in 2024**, with Washington state tying the District for best in the nation. For the first time in decades, we **eliminated operational vacancies**, stabilizing our uniform staffing, and we've delivered **twelve consecutive Cadet Classes**, offering DC high school graduates a direct pathway into public safety careers.

We launched a **whole blood program** that has delivered **over 500 life-saving units of blood**. We expanded our clinical governance and improved patient outcomes system-wide. We trained **153,000 residents** in hands-only CPR. We implemented the **Nurse Triage Line** and partnered with clinics to reduce unnecessary emergency department usage. We opened the District's **first Stabilization Center**, strengthened our systems during COVID without reducing services, launched **third-party ambulance transport** to stabilize EMS availability, and partnered with the University of the District of Columbia to launch DC's **first publicly accessible paramedic program**.

Firefighter safety has always remained at the forefront. We **implemented National Fire Protection Association 1500 and 1710** which set the minimum requirements for comprehensive firefighter safety, strengthening protections for our members by ensuring safer operations, better training, and a department-wide commitment to both reducing injuries and enhancing long-term well-being. And we released **updated Standard Operating Guidelines** for fireground operations reflecting emerging best practices in the fire service.

We've invested **about \$240 million in apparatus and fleet replacement** since FY16, ensuring our frontline units remain modern, reliable, and safe. And we've modernized our equipment from **cardiac monitors to breathing apparatus to personal escape systems**. We've also advanced **major facilities improvements, including seven new or fully renovated firehouses**, a new EMS training facility, a fleet maintenance facility under construction, and citywide HVAC, roof, and infrastructure upgrades.

Finally, in collaboration with our labor partners, we have reached agreement on two – soon three – collective bargaining agreements with increased compensation and protections with IAFF Local 36 and completed the first working conditions agreement with AFGE Local 3721 in over 30 years.

These accomplishments have strengthened our foundation heading into FY27.



Turning to the budget itself, the FY27 proposed gross operating budget for the Department is \$402.6 million, which funds 2,274 employees. The Mayor's proposal reflects both the rising costs of emergency service delivery and the District's need to target investments where they will have the greatest impact.

This year's local budget includes several strategic **increases** that support operational readiness, personnel, and essential non-personnel needs, including:

- **\$5.4 million (\$5,454,157)** to support rising non-personnel services costs, especially contractual services.
- **\$4.2 million (\$4,191,168)** to better align the personnel budget with anticipated salary and fringe obligations.

For **federal funds**, the increases include:

- **\$25.9 million (\$25,983,307)** to support overtime.
- **\$2.8 million (\$2,820,056)** to bolster contractual service needs across programs.

The Department will also receive a mix of local and federal funds totaling \$2.9 million for supplies and materials needed for daily operations and to align fixed costs with current estimates and shift nine FTEs from local to federal.

Collectively, these adjustments ensure we can maintain essential emergency response capacity and continue delivering high-quality care.

At the same time, the Mayor's proposal identifies areas where we can achieve responsible reductions without compromising core services. The Department will take a \$2.69 million reduction across multiple programs, primarily driven by savings in non-personnel services such as government subsidies and grants.

Turning now to the capital budget, the Mayor’s proposed FY27-FY32 capital plan makes substantial, forward-looking investments that ensure our apparatus, facilities, and operational infrastructure remain strong for years to come. The Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department is slated to receive **more than \$470 million in capital allotments** over the six-year financial plan with **over \$100 million in FY27**. These investments reflect both the scale of our mission and the operational demands of a modern fire and EMS system.

The capital plan begins with major progress on our long-standing facilities needs. The District proposes continued investment in the ongoing construction of the **new fleet maintenance reserve facility** totaling more than **\$63 million**, ensuring we have the capacity to maintain a growing and increasingly complex fleet. The plan also funds recurring **scheduled capital improvements** at our firehouses—totaling approximately **\$30 million**—to address HVAC systems, roofs, living quarters, and other critical building components that keep our stations safe, functional, and operational 24 hours a day. This fund ensures that the home bases of our firefighters are clean, functional, and fit for purpose. Finally, the Mayor has allocated nearly **\$27 million** for the construction of a **new Engine Company 34 firehouse at RFK** to support the new stadium and surrounding neighborhood. This facility will house the first new engine and truck companies in the District in several decades.

Apparatus replacement continues to be one of our largest and most essential capital commitments. The capital plan includes funding for new **ambulances, pumpers, ladder trucks, and tower ladders**. These investments collectively represent over **\$347 million** in apparatus procurement over the six-year plan. The annual allocations ensure we can continue replacing units on a predictable lifecycle despite national supply chain delays that have extended delivery timelines. By engaging in early planning of predictable apparatus purchases, the District not only saves money through more efficient procurement strategies but also ensures we maintain the highest standards of safety for both our employees and residents.

Taken together, this capital program represents a sustained commitment by Mayor Bowser to ensure Fire and EMS has the facilities, vehicles, and equipment required to meet the District’s needs, today and well into the future. These long-term investments protect our operational readiness, enhance safety, and ensure that our personnel have the tools and environments they need to deliver lifesaving services every day.



Chairperson Pinto, the FY27 proposed budget supports the critical work of our firefighter/EMTs, firefighter/paramedics, and professional staff. It balances fiscal responsibility with strategic investments that keep our department strong and our city safe. Despite the fiscal challenges we face, Mayor Bowser’s budget maintains our operational readiness and continues to invest in the people and capabilities that save lives every day.

Thank you for your continued partnership and for your support of the men and women of DC Fire and EMS. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.