



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

**WRITTEN COMMENTS OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT HEARING FOR THE COMMITTEE
ON FIRE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
MARCH 24ST, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank the New York City Fire Department for holding this hearing on a critical issue, raising the cost of ambulance services.

In 2022, EMS responded to 1.58 million calls, a staggering amount. There is a tremendous amount of pressure on EMS staff to respond to calls timely as well as performing lifesaving medical care. EMS deserve a fair wage for the necessary work that they do. Pay parity is necessary for the FDNY and EMS, as EMTs are paid 40% less than other New York first responders, according to Local 2507 President Owen Barzalay. The Office of the Public Advocate strongly believes in raising the salary of EMS staff to achieve full pay parity.

Raising wages for EMS workers must be done, and should not be correlated to the price for ambulance services. Many patients who suffer serious accidents often call taxis instead of ambulances because of the high cost of ambulances. Raising ambulance services rates will further dissuade impoverished New Yorkers from calling an ambulance. Even for those that have insurance, copays on ambulance services can often lead to serious financial stress. I oppose the proposed rate increases, as it will lead to financial hardship and fear of using ambulance services. The FDNY must have a cap on the cost for ambulance services. The FDNY should explore alternatives to generate revenue, such as negotiating reimbursement rates with insurance companies.

On March 13th, 2023 the New York City Council Committee on Fire and Emergency Management invited FDNY leadership to testify on the preliminary budget. At the hearing, Commissioner Kavanaugh stated that patients who cannot afford an ambulance can utilize a FDNY settlement program and a charity program. Yet, when looking at the official FDNY Ambulatory Billing link¹, there is no mention of the FDNY settlement program. How are average New Yorkers being connected to that service? There must be public information available and resources available for impoverished New Yorkers who cannot afford ambulance services. More public information on resources and payment plans available will help convince New Yorkers not to put their life in danger. Some of the money raised by the pay hikes should go towards outreach, especially in medical institutions that serve the poor. Thank you.

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/fdny/about/resources/policy-and-agreements/fee-schedule.page>