



The Uniformed EMTs, Paramedics and Inspectors – F.D.N.Y

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TESTIMONY OF OREN BARZILAY, PRESIDENT FDNY EMS, LOCAL 2507 October 17, 2023

Good afternoon,

My name is Oren Barzilay. I'm a 26-year veteran of the FDNY EMS and President of FDNY EMS Local 2507. I am here today to speak on behalf of more than 4,300 Uniformed FDNY EMTs, Paramedics & Fire Inspectors.

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before a committee long supportive of the FDNY EMS workforce.

There is no denying that New York is facing large labor shortages in the civil service sector, especially among FDNY EMS personnel.

Any EMT or paramedic will tell you that these shortages are the result of decades of pay disparity.

EMS members are paid about 40% to 50% less than New York's other great first responder agencies.

Poverty wages and truly difficult, if not horrific, work conditions for members result in EMS losing on average 30% of new hires within 3 years; and 50% in 5 years! That is a massive attrition rate.

After going through the training academy, and receiving critical on-the-job experience, our proud and dedicated medical first responders recognize the highly uncompetitive pay and poor on the job conditions.

Some leave for other cities or even jobs with private firms, where they can easily make \$20,000 to \$30,000 more per year. Many of my members have left the FDNY and are now working for the Nassau County EMS, with many more applying there.

Just 15 miles from this chamber, Nassau County EMTs and paramedics can earn up to \$142,000 a year after 12 years on the job, with a starting salary of \$50,000. After just one year, these medics will make \$81,000, which is \$6,000 more than a 20-year FDNY medic.

When compared to our members, FDNY EMTs are earning a starting salary of \$39,000. Even after 20 years working in FDNY EMS, salaries top out at \$59,000.

New York spends tens of thousands of dollars training each EMS professional but compensates them more like teenagers on a weekly allowance.

It's why our first responder force is constantly experiencing massive brain drain!

On top of that, members are leaving because the pension system is shockingly inadequate. 9/11 heroes among our members, even those with advanced illnesses and cancer, are denied or given the bureaucratic runaround.

Many of the FDNY's EMTs and paramedics live outside of the five boroughs, unable to afford rent in the city that they work. They even have to pay a NYC tax called 1127 that costs EMTs an additional \$4,000-\$6,000 a year just for working in the city.

Next the looming prospect of congestion pricing will only cause further financial harm to thousands of EMTs.

If an EMT works five days a week, earning just \$18.93 per hour, proposed congestion pricing would equate to 1.5 hours of each day's pay, or \$115 per week. That doesn't include paying for gas or tolls, just to make it to work. Given that, why would anyone choose to work in Manhattan?

For the members that live outside of the city, taking mass transit is impossible, even unaffordable if they live an hour or two away from New York City.

Meanwhile, Tier 6 members of the pension plan are now paying a 12% contribution, compared to 6% for Tier 4 employees.

Coupled with severe limits on the amount of overtime allowed for Tier 6, no one can afford to remain employed for long with the FDNY EMS service.

For years, we have communicated with FDNY leadership about pay parity issues. Promises made about parity and improved working conditions date back to before the 1996 merger of EMS into FDNY.

These commitments they made, shamefully, never materialized. Instead, we have been forced to resort to different methods to get our point across.

Unfortunately, we have WON two federal class action workplace discrimination lawsuits. I say unfortunately because it never should have come to that.

Our union sued for and won a federal employment and wage discrimination suit, with the US Justice Department and the federal judge recognizing the overpowering merits of our case.

Yet another reason EMS workers are leaving the Department is the alarming trend of surging assaults against them while simply trying to do their job.

EMT assaults are at an all-time high, doubling in the last year and many hundreds of members are no longer even reporting them.

For the sake of our members and for the future of FDNY EMS as New York City's Medical First Responders, we hope that this is the year and the Administration, where true pay parity will be addressed.

The reality is that under the City of New York's most recent guideline, app-based food delivery workers will soon have a \$19.96 per hour wage floor, or about \$1 more than the highly trained Medical First Responders of the FDNY EMS.

In the case of the so-called “**Deliveristas**,” the city was very proactive – in fact, aggressive – in implementing this wage hike, but when it comes to their own workforce, at the busiest EMS service in the world, they just won’t do the right thing.

The dedicated women and men of EMS – and the citizens we are sworn to protect – absolutely deserve better than we have been subjected to.

Thank You all for your time and consideration.