



**BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON**

**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Fire and Emergency Management  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 13, 2026**

Thank you Chair Ariola and the members of the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management for your continued diligence in scrutinizing the proposed budgets for FDNY and NYCEM. These critical agencies do essential work to protect New Yorkers in emergencies, and our constituents are counting on us to ensure that they are operating at the highest levels of efficiency and capacity.

I am testifying today in particular to advocate for the restoration of the fifth firefighter to fire engines across the city, starting with those in The Bronx. Since the 1980s, our city has moved between four and five firefighters for every engine company that responds to a fire. These switches have come as part of efforts to save money, with budget crunches leading successive mayors to remove the fifth firefighters. Most recently, in 2023, Mayor Adams removed the fifth firefighter from the 20 engine companies that had them, only to restore them the following year when the budget situation improved.

This continual shift between staffing levels should end, and the City should commit to bringing five-firefighter crews to all engines in our city. This would bring New York in line with the international standard for comparable cities around the world. Given the high number of fires that we have seen across our borough and city, this program would prove to be greatly beneficial to protecting the lives and homes of thousands of New Yorkers.

Five-firefighter crews are associated with faster response times and more efficient staffing. As early as 1987, FDNY data showed that a team of five was able to stretch a hose and make it up to the fifth floor of a building about four minutes faster than a team of four.<sup>1</sup> These few minutes can prove crucial in saving lives, preventing fires from spreading, and protecting our firefighters from injury.

When fires occur, FDNY protocols often necessitate sending three four-firefighter engines in response, when two five-firefighter engines would be appropriate. This results in delays in getting all the personnel and equipment to the fire and ties down a third engine from responding to additional incidents in their response area.

Fire companies in The Bronx are facing increased demands, in excess of the other boroughs. The average engine company in our borough responds to 5,298 calls per year, which is more than 14 runs per day, compared to a citywide average of just over 10 runs per day. And this number is only increasing due to additional demands of EMS, aging buildings, extreme weather, and lithium-ion

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<sup>1</sup> <https://citylimits.org/city-pact-with-fdny-union-addresses-longstanding-staffing-issue/>

batteries. Adding a fifth firefighter to each engine would save approximately 14,000 runs per year boroughwide, at a cheaper price tag than adding additional engines to meet the gap.

As part of the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, the Council should take the step of restoring five-firefighter crews to all engines, starting in The Bronx. Help protect the lives of our residents and ensure the safety of our firefighters during emergencies.

I want to thank the members of the Council, and particularly our Bronx delegation chairs, Council Members Justin Sanchez and Amanda Farías, for their leadership on this issue. Additionally, I want to thank the Uniformed Firefighters Associated for their continued advocacy for a responsible level of staffing at all engine companies. I urge the Council to provide the funding that FDNY needs to make this change and ensure that our residents are best protected during fire emergencies.