



THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

May 12, 2009

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VACCA, COLLEAGUES, UNION LEADERS URGE CITY TO RESTORE FUNDING FOR FDNY/EMS

Ill-advised budget plan would eliminate 16 fire companies and 30 ambulance tours

CITY HALL — Immediately prior to a Fire and Criminal Justice Services Committee hearing where FDNY Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta was scheduled to testify, Council Member James Vacca (D-Bronx), Chair of the Committee, joined colleagues, union officials, firefighters, and affected New Yorkers on the steps of City Hall to urge the Administration to withdraw plans to close 16 fire companies and eliminate 30 ambulance tours over the next year.

“Not only is the city closing the four companies already announced — they also plan to close an unprecedented 12 additional companies on or about January 1 without giving us any details now,” **said Council Member Vacca**. “This places many Council Members in a position where they will be forced to vote on a budget without the transparency needed to make an informed decision or to evaluate the impact of such cuts. The rationale for closing any engine or ladder company just does not fly, and today we are sounding an alarm that will be heard right through budget negotiations that any fire cuts mean increased response times and reduced public safety, which we cannot accept.”

The four fire companies slated for closure on July 1 are those currently subject to nighttime closure: Ladder 53 in the Bronx, Engine 4 in Manhattan, Engine 161 on Staten Island, and Engine 271 in Brooklyn. The additional 12 engine and ladder companies have not been identified, despite numerous requests from Vacca and the Fire Committee. The 30 EMS tours have also not been identified.

“It is time for New Yorkers to stand up and tell the Bloomberg Administration to Stop the Madness,” **said Steve Cassidy, President of the Uniformed Firefighters Association**. “New Yorkers deserve emergency medical and fire protection and it is absolutely foolish for the City of New York to be closing 16 more fire companies, at a time when the FDNY has completed its four busiest years in its 140-plus-year history — including 473,335 emergency responses in 2008.”

Vacca and colleagues have consistently opposed the closures since December, saying that the reduction in fire services — which follows six company closures in May 2003 — will push up response times citywide. If Ladder 53 closes, for example, ladder response times on City Island will double to nearly 10 minutes because the next-nearest firehouse is over four miles away. In 2003, response times in affected communities increased by between 30 seconds and a minute.

The FDNY announced the closures in January amid across-the-board 7.5% budget cuts ordered by the Administration. Fire services were not exempted despite the fact that New York City pays less per capita for fire protection than most other major metropolitan areas in the United States, according

to a March 2009 study commissioned by Columbus, Ohio. The study found that the FDNY, despite being the largest and busiest fire department in the company, spends just \$157.56 per person, less than half of San Francisco's \$315.81 figure.

“As elected officials, protecting our people is our number-one responsibility,” **said Council Member Alan Gerson (D-Manhattan)**, who represents the coverage area of Engine 4. “Compromising the safety of New York’s citizens and firefighters is not an acceptable budget exercise. Not only must there be no further cutbacks, nighttime fire engine companies and all shifts of EMS services must be fully restored, immediately.”

“This plan to close these four fire companies, including Engine 161 in my district, is unacceptable and dangerous,” **said Council Member James Oddo (R-Staten Island)**. “New Yorkers should not be forced to face greater risks of death and serious injury because of misguided budget priorities. The reality is that the anticipated savings of closing these companies are infinitesimal when viewed in the perspective of a city budget of almost \$60 billion. Like my colleagues, I believe that public safety is the most important function of government, and during difficult financial times it is incumbent on us to find cost savings in areas other than public safety. I urge New Yorkers to contact Mayor Bloomberg to tell him that closing firehouses and compromising public safety is unacceptable.”

“Response time is crucial because fire grows exponentially every minute,” **said Council Member Elizabeth Crowley (D-Queens)**, part of whose district is covered by Engine 271. “In an area lined with attached and semi-attached houses, one house burning can spread into an entire block burning. This is a safety issue where time lost equals lives lost. Furthermore, the emergency services provided by the firehouses not only respond to fires but also to emergency calls such as gas leaks and heart attacks. With the recent closings of St. John’s, Mary Immaculate and Parkway hospitals, emergency response is already stretched far too thin. A heart attack victim only has five minutes — who will save this person? Without 271, who will save them?”

“New Yorkers expect and deserve to know that their government is doing everything possible to keep them safe, and that starts with firehouses,” **said Council Member Eric Gioia (D-Queens)**, whose district lost a fire company in 2003. “In a fire, seconds count, and even a few closures can mean a big difference in a neighborhood — especially when lives are at stake.”

In addition to colleagues and union officials, Vacca was joined on the steps by representatives of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association and by a group of residents from City Island, who took the 90-minute trip to City Hall to show how serious they are about protecting Ladder 53.

“The Uniformed Fire Officers Association opposes the elimination of four more fire companies,” **said UFOA President Battalion Chief John J. McDonnell**. “If the Fire Department is once again diminished, the result will be longer response times that put lives and property at unacceptable levels of risk. Four more abandoned fire companies, added to the six engine companies closed in 2003, represents the most severe attack on the FDNY since the 1970s — the days when the Bronx and the rest of the City were burning.”

“These senseless cuts are putting the residents of City Island — and the thousands of non-residents who visit City Island every weekend to eat at a restaurant or take out a boat — at risk,” **said longtime resident Inge Otto**. “We deserve the same fire response times as every other community in New York City, and we won’t stop fighting until we are assured full-time, on-Island fire protection in the form of both an engine and ladder company.”

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