

October 28, 2011

The Honorable Rep. Gus Bilirakis
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bilirakis,

My name is Donald R. Austin. I am the Executive Fire Commissioner of the Detroit Fire Department. I have been on the job 158 days as of today and look forward to making this Department an "all hazards" response organization.

My background in the fire service began over 30 years ago in the Los Angeles Fire Department. I rose to the rank of Assistant Chief in the Los Angeles Fire Department and have a background in the aviation and maritime domain as well as the traditional fire service discipline. In that capacity, I have been involved in large-scale emergencies from wild land fires, earthquakes, multi-casualty incidents, civil unrest, simulated aircraft accidents, and maritime emergency exercises. In addition to being a fire fighter, I was an emergency medical technician most of my fire service career.

I am a student of the National Response Framework and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). I have operated as a unified incident commander, agency representative, and in many other incident command positions. I am certified in ICS 100, 200, 300, 400, 700 and 800 and have taken additional NIMS courses in the course of my fire service career. I have worked with many fire departments in the United States as a promotional examination panel participant, and consulted internationally by providing an Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting capability assessment for the El Dorado Nuevo Airport in Bogotá, Columbia. I bring this fire service experience to the Detroit Fire Department and the City of Detroit at the Honorable Mayor Dave Bing's request.

The main thrust of my testimony before this committee is to highlight the need for support of grant funding to increase organizational capability and preparedness. This is extremely important because of the fiscal challenges facing the City and region. Our ability to manage day-to-day fire and emergency medical incidents within our allotted budget is becoming more difficult. We are currently projecting a \$14 million deficit at the close of this fiscal year. This lack of funding will inherently reduce the level of service on a daily basis and make it more difficult to respond to incidents of national significance.

The City of Detroit located in southeastern Michigan is a city of over 700,000 residents with an area of 139 square miles. Detroit completely encircles the cities of Hamtramck

and Highland Park. The Detroit Tri-County area of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties has a population of 3,863,000, as of the 2010 census, with an area of 1,967 square miles. Detroit is the largest city in the state of Michigan and the seat of Wayne County. Detroit has three of the four major league professional sports teams located in downtown. Detroit is known by many nicknames to include Arsenal of Democracy, the Motor City, Motown, and America's Automotive Capital to name a few.

Detroit is an important transportation hub. It has three international border crossings, the Ambassador Bridge, Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, and the Michigan Central Railway Tunnel, linking Detroit to Windsor, Ontario. The Ambassador Bridge is the single busiest border crossing in North America, carrying 27% of the total trade between the U.S. and Canada.

The Detroit Wayne County Port Authority imported and exported over 17 million tons of cargo. In 2005 this accounted for 5,851 direct jobs and 4,505 indirect jobs; \$201,629,000 in State and local taxes and business revenue in excess of 164 million dollars. The Detroit River is the southern border of the City and also represents an international border between the United States and Canada. The Detroit River is a 32 mile long river with over 29 port terminals. Detroit is 618 nautical miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean via the Saint Lawrence Seaway.

My city, although still struggling during these fiscally difficult times, is on a path of rebirth. The City of Detroit is winning efforts to lure the region's growth companies downtown with business tax incentives, entertainment, an International Riverfront, and repopulating the inner city with residents living downtown. The world headquarters of Compuware (over 2500 employees), Quicken Loans (over 4000 employees), and General Motors (over 4600 employees) are located in downtown Detroit. Additionally, Fortune 500 companies like American Axle & Manufacturing and DTE Energy are located in Detroit. Blue Cross recently completed a move into downtown relocating upwards of 5000 employees.

While these are very positive signs of Detroit turning the corner, many difficult days lay ahead. The population declined by 25% or 200,000 in the last ten years. This has left many vacant/abandoned structures to contend with. The number of vacant/abandoned structures is said to be as high as 80,000. In fact, the last line of duty death involving Fire Fighter Walter Harris occurred in a vacant single-family dwelling after two previous fires. Seventy percent of the fire incidents occur in vacant/abandoned structures.

The severe population decline not only left many vacant structures in the City, it represents an erosion of the property tax base, reduced City income tax, and State revenue-sharing necessary to provide the level of services for a new Detroit. However, it remains a fact that public safety services, fire, EMS, and law enforcement constitute more than 50% of the City's general fund expenditures, which exceeds \$1 billion dollars.

Mayor Bing is working feverishly to overcome a structural deficit and return the City to financial health. Mayor Bing's personal commitment is illustrated in the fact that he has

accepted a salary of one dollar a year. The Fire Department under my leadership is working hard to remake itself into an organization that can meet the challenges of a new Detroit and the threats that have become the reality of the 21st century. We are diligently working to become fully NIMS compliant and, our members are currently enrolled in FEMA online NIMS training for ICS 100, 200, 700, and 800 courses.

The Detroit Fire Department has 1400 personnel and approximately 985 fire fighters and 240 emergency medical personnel. We deploy 236 fire fighters in 44 fire stations across the city and respond to over 30,000 fire calls and 130,000 EMS calls for service annually. In addition to the traditional fire service, we provide hazardous materials, urban search and rescue, a limited maritime and aviation domain capability.

The average age of the fire station buildings is 81 years old with the oldest active fire station being 118 years old. This represents a significant draw on a budget of \$186,400,000 of which 95% is salaries and benefits. The average age of my fire fighters is 43½ years, which result in a pretty significant injury rate and negatively impacts my overtime budget. The 21 ambulances have an average of 149,000 miles and breakdown frequently. The logistical support staff which maintains fire and EMS apparatus is equally challenged and has a difficult time doing preventive maintenance.

The Fire Department has one fire boat; the Curtis Randolph built in 1979. It is the only Class A fire boat on the Detroit River and in Southeastern Michigan with a pumping capacity of 10,000 gallons per minute. The response district for the Curtis Randolph is Windmill Pointe at the mouth of Lake St. Clair south to the Trenton Turning Basin. The fire boat will be taken out of service on November 1, 2011, and returned to service in June 2012.

On February 2, 1999, the Curtis Randolph responded to a boiler explosion and fire at the Ford Motor Company, Rouge Power Plant. This fire killed six and injured 14 workers. The fire boat supplied water for approximately three months while repairs to the plant were made. Our response allowed operations to continue relatively uninterrupted.

The Curtis Randolph is the only U.S. Fire boat to ever fight a fire on foreign shores. Windsor, Canada officials called on the Curtis Randolph in April 1999 to assist in extinguishing a fire at the river side Ramada Inn. Mayor Dennis Archer called the fire boat from the Rouge Power Plant incident to the Windsor hotel fire.

The northeast electrical power outage of August 2003 threatened United States Steel production operations. The blast furnaces used in the process required water to keep them operational. The Curtis Randolph was placed into fire service to assist with supplying river water to the plant. This incident required the fire boat to pump river water to keep its blast furnaces operational during the several days of the electrical grid outage.

Vulnerabilities to Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications

In addition to providing an emergency response capability to the residents of Detroit, Detroit being situated on an international water border should have maritime capabilities to respond to threats to security and natural disasters that could impact the continuity of operations of businesses and the City.

The Detroit Fire Department is not especially situated to respond to a mass casualty scenario. This is an identified weakness in our “all hazards” capability, which sooner than later must be addressed.

Below are some identified critical infrastructure and disaster scenarios in the Detroit area that would require a response by the Detroit Fire Department.

Infrastructure	Incident Type	Consequence
Renaissance Center	Fire (1) VBIED (2) CBRNE	Approximately 13,000 occupants; GM World Headquarters; GM is a major defense contractor; tallest hotel in the US and Michigan’s tallest building
Electrical Grid	Fires	Failure of City water main pressure could occur and negatively impact downtown
Water Main Failure	Fires	Major outage could severely impact downtown high-rise infrastructure
Hart Plaza and the Detroit Riverfront	Multi-casualty	Depending on the number of simultaneous events could attract more than one million visitors
Detroit River	Oil Spill	Damage to the environment and ecosystem
Maritime Commerce	Vessel Fire Loss of propulsion	Blockage of the river
Bridges and Tunnels	Terrorist Attack	Collapse
Sports Stadiums	VBIED CBRNE	Ford Field capacity is 65,000 Comerica 40,000 Joe Louis 20,000
North American International Auto Show	Multi-casualty	High media coverage; patient generating event

(1) Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device

(2) Chemical, Biological, Radiological Nuclear, and Explosive

Efforts to Shore up Vulnerabilities

Since the beginning of my tenure as the Executive Fire Commissioner, I have been actively seeking to expand this organization's relationship with area fire departments by becoming a member of the Southeastern Michigan Fire Chiefs Association. The Detroit Fire Department has reached out to Southfield, Warren, Dearborn, Highland Park and Hamtramck Fire Department seeking to enter into a Mutual Aid agreement for reciprocity of fire and rescue services. We did not enter into an agreement relative to emergency medical incidents because our EMS resources are strained on a daily basis and our fire fighters are not EMT trained. However, it is my goal to move the organization in this direction. Eighty-five percent of the workload in the United States fire service is delivering emergency medical services to the communities they serve.

We have a relationship with many agencies such as:

- US Coast Guard Sector Detroit, Commander Jeffrey E. Ogden, Captain of the Port
- 51st Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team
- City of Windsor Fire and Rescue Services, Fire Chief Bruce Montone
- U. S. Customs and Border Protection, Detroit Sector
- Michigan Urban Search and Rescue Task Force 1
- Hart Medical EMS Services – A Private Ambulance Company
- Detroit Emergency Medical Service Authority
- Detroit Medical Center
- Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority, John Jamian Executive Director

The Department is also considering joining the Michigan Emergency Management Assistance Compact (MEMAC). MEMAC is designed to help Michigan's 1,776 local political subdivisions share vital public safety services and resources more effectively and efficiently. Neither the state nor any local jurisdiction can afford to acquire and maintain all the manpower, equipment and other resources that would be necessary to respond to every possible emergency or major disaster, especially terrorist acts involving chemical, biological or nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

Since my appointment as Executive Fire Commissioner, the Department participated in the "Detroit River Readiness 2011" full-scale exercise. More than 65 US and Canadian federal, state and local emergency response partner agencies took part in a full-scale, cross-border security, mass rescue and oil spill response exercise, on Aug. 23 and 24 along the Detroit River Corridor from Trenton north in the river to Detroit and Windsor.

The Fire Department also works collaboratively with private ambulance services to support large-scale downtown events such as the fireworks display during River Days, and other downtown public events.

Through the leadership of Mayor Bing one public safety headquarters is being built to house the Fire and Police Departments, Homeland Security, and elements of the Michigan State Police. The co-locating of these public safety agencies will improve inter-relationship, coordination, and unified command operations, which will improve our ability to manage an “all-risk” emergency incident.

The Detroit Fire Department submitted grants for equipment and apparatus under the Assistant to Fire Fighter Grant Program (AFG). The primary goal of the AFG is to meet the emergency response needs of fire departments and emergency medical service organizations. There was over \$404,000,000 available in grant funds for 2011. Items requested by the Detroit Fire Department include:

3	Pumper/Engine	\$1,500,000
1	Ladder Truck	750,000
977	Personal Protective Equipment	2,071,240
100	Automatic External Defibrillator	150,000
7	Air Cascade Filling Systems	494,102
Total		\$4,965,342

The Public Safety Foundation of Detroit has recently expanded to include the Detroit Fire Department. This is a significant development for our service. Under this umbrella my agency can submit request for funding various equipment needs and possibly the costs sharing associated with the aforementioned grants.

The Detroit Fire Department is comprised of dedicated men and women who strives everyday to deliver the best service to the citizens of this great city. We have a Mayor and City Council who has prioritized public safety as number one. We in the fire and EMS service recognize that even with such prioritization for public safety there are other essential services a city must provide its citizens. Times have been difficult but because of our fire service “make it happen” attitude we continue to serve our community with professionalism and pride.

As the Executive Fire Commissioner for the Detroit Fire Department, I want to thank the Committee for offering me an opportunity to present some insight into this great Department, which I am proud to be a member of.

Respectfully,

DONALD R. AUSTIN
Executive Fire Commissioner
Detroit Fire Department

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