

The United States Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
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FDNY Chief/Commissioner (Retired)

Terrorism, as defined by The Department of Homeland Security, is nothing new to the City of New York. From the 1864 attempt by eight Confederate operatives to burn a large area of the City, (Which ironically accelerated New York's establishment of a paid Fire Department – Now the FDNY – a few months later), to the Wall Street bombing of 1920 which killed 38 and wounded more than 100, to the “Mad Bomber” of the 1940's and 1950's, Anti-war bombings and the FALN of the 1960's and 1970's, to the attacks on the World Trade Center in 1983 and 2001. In the 25 years since 9/11, terrorist attacks in New York City, albeit on a smaller scale, have continued. Some involving groups and others involving individuals. The weapons used have varied from improvised explosive devices to firearms, knives, hatchets, and vehicles. What weapons will be used in possible, or should we say probable, future attacks – drones, chemical/biological, cyber-attacks, etc. – must be constantly planned for. The challenges are immense.

While the Fire Department has always stood ready to protect life and property in New York City and has responded to acts of terrorism throughout its history, its focus on terrorism had been somewhat minimal prior to the attack on the World Trade Center in 1983. In February of that year, terrorists parked a van filled with explosive material in the garage under the Towers. A long fuse was lit, allowing the perpetrators time to escape before detonation. The terrorists' intention was to bring down one tower into the other, causing the collapse of both and thousands of deaths.

While the detonation caused considerable damage and numerous deaths and injuries, the towers survived the blast.

Following this attack and the extensive response and operations of the City's Fire and Police Departments, planning and preparedness in our city increased. Efforts were undertaken to better prepare both agencies for future acts of terrorism. In 1996, The Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, OEM, under the effective leadership of the late Jerome Hauer, was created. OEM was tasked with coordinating the response of City agencies to all forms of emergencies. OEM planned inter-agency training and drills and helped improve coordination and communication. While OEM proved effective in improving the overall response to and coordination at emergencies, In September 2001 it was still a work-in-progress.

The morning of September 11th, 2001, began as a brilliantly clear and bright late-summer day. In the hour between 8:00 and 9:00 AM, FDNY members in fire houses throughout the city were in the midst of a shift change with members preparing to head home while others prepared to relieve them. At Headquarters, the work of the day began, with the Department's leadership engaged in the business of managing the busiest Fire Department in the world.

FDNY Headquarters is located across the East River from the World Trade Center, in the MetroTech Complex in Brooklyn, between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges. I was FDNY's Chief of Operations, second in command to Chief of Department Peter Ganci. Our offices on the seventh floor of Headquarters had windows facing the towers. Just before 8:47 AM I entered my office following an earlier meeting when I heard a loud noise and felt the building shake. At that instant Chief Ganci shouted out to me: "Dan, look out of your window. A plane has just hit the World Trade Center." We did not know what type of plane it was or why it had struck the building's upper floors.

We later learned that it was American Airlines flight 11, a large Boeing 767 which had recently taken off, bound for California with its fuel tanks full of jet fuel.

Chief Ganci and I responded together toward the Twin Towers over a miraculously traffic-free Brooklyn Bridge. From the bridge we had a clear view of the impact area in the north tower, 1 World Trade Center. Seeing what appeared to be 10 floors of intense fire, one thousand feet up, I said two things to Chief Ganci, (although I am sure he was already thinking the same thing.) “This will be the worst day of our lives”, and “we cannot put out that much fire on the upper floors of the building.” Chief Ganci immediately transmitted a fifth alarm, bringing 250 Department members to the scene.

We quickly arrived and began to establish our command post on West Street at the foot of the north tower. Units, commanded by Battalion Chief Joseph Pfeiffer, were already inside the tower. Soon after our arrival, at 9:03 a loud noise caused me to look up just as United Airlines flight 175, another 767 bound for California, travelling over five hundred miles per hour, struck the south tower, 2 World Trade Center, floors 77 to 85. Now our somewhat impossible task had doubled in size. The two tallest building in New York City had been attacked by terrorists, were seriously damaged and burning out of control. A second fifth alarm was transmitted, (eventually followed by a third fifth alarm). An unknown number of people were trapped at and above the damaged floors in both towers, and many others below the stricken floors were having difficulty exiting the buildings. The impact of the hijacked airliners caused the elevators (all but two serving lower floors) to become damaged and inoperable. The standpipe systems, designed to allow water for firefighting to be pumped to the upper floors, had also been damaged and presumed to be inoperable as well.

Although, as I stated early on, I believed extinguishment, at this point, was beyond our capacity, that did not mean we would just stand by. 911 calls from occupants trapped in the towers answered at our dispatch center were unimaginably frantic and heart-wrenching. All our dispatchers could do was to tell the callers to hang-on, we are coming for you. And we were. Without elevator service, reaching the upper floors was exceedingly difficult and time-consuming. But we would do our absolute best to climb to the impact area and try to reach those trapped. In the south tower we know, from members' communications captured by recording devices, that our members had reached the impact area and were preparing to advance up one partially obstructed stairway when suddenly that communication ceased.

At 9:58:59 the south tower collapsed. Total collapse took only 11 seconds. While we were prepared for and expected localized collapses within the towers, this was not anticipated, certainly not at this stage in our operations. Chief Ganci issued the order for our members to remove themselves from the north tower. Many were able to get out, while others were either too high-up in the building or assisting occupants. At 9:58:59 the north tower collapsed. Chief Ganci and First Deputy Commissioner William Feehan, while assisting in the rescue of members trapped in the south tower's collapse, were struck by debris from the north tower and killed. We discovered their bodies later that afternoon.

The collapses caused damage and numerous fires in surrounding buildings and vehicles and damaged our water supply system. Our surviving units, and other units brought in, were tasked with finding ways to deal with that as well as searching for survivors. As the afternoon wore on, World Trade Center 7, a 47-story building just across Vesey Street from what was the north tower, began to worry us. We ordered our members out of the building and cleared a collapse zone. At 5:20 that afternoon, 7 World Trade Center collapsed.

At some time that day we learned that American Airline flight 77 had struck the Pentagon in Washington, and United Airlines flight 93 had crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. A total of 2977 innocent people were killed on September 11th, 2001. 2,753 in New York (including 343 members of the Fire Department (FDNY), 37 from the Port Authority Police Department (PAPD), and 23 from the New York City Police Department (NYPD), 184 at the Pentagon, and 40 in Shanksville.

Books have been written about the days that followed, but I will try to briefly sum it up. The entire area that was the World Trade Center looked other-worldly. Fires burned for 99 days beneath what remained. While the first week to 10 days was referred to as a rescue operation, few people were rescued, and none after September 12th. After the rescue effort became a recovery operation, work continued until May 30, 2002. FDNY members, their counterparts in The NYPD and PAPD, as well as many others, remained on-scene, searching for the victim's remains, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week until that final day. To date, of the 2,753 victims at the World Trade Center, the remains of roughly 40% have not yet been identified.

Were we prepared for the attack on the World Trade Center of September 11th 2001? As John Miller, a former Deputy Commissioner at NYPD, is quoted as saying: "Using commercial airplanes as missiles being flown by trained pilots wasn't on anyone's frame of reference." That being said, all of us on the Federal, State and local level have made great progress in studying, planning and thwarting current and future terrorist attacks.

At the Fire Department we have always reviewed our actions following fatal fires, complicated operations, and unusual responses. What did we do right? What mistakes were made? What could we have done better and what needs to change to make us an even better Department?

No response in our history had more fatalities and was more complicated and unusual than what I have just summarized. We believed it would be helpful to ask for expert help in our review and critique. We contacted the consulting firm McKinsey and Company and they agreed to work with us. Some important suggestions contained in the final report of that review have made us a better Department. More able to meet future challenges.

One is rooted in the assistance we received from the US Forest Service immediately after the attacks. When I first heard that they were coming to assist us I was quite skeptical. What do forest fire specialists have to do with our urban environment? The Forest Service manages events that may last for weeks and months. FDNY generally puts-out the fire, returns the property to the owners or the NYPD and gets ready for the next alarm. The operations at the World Trade Center site would be ongoing. The Forest Service taught us how best to manage a long-term incident. Afterwards we decided to form our own Incident Management Team, The IMT, (now consisting of over 300 trained members). When I returned to the Department in 2014, I found The IMT to be one of the biggest improvements. They have helped manage many events here and across the country. Our response to the COVID crisis is a perfect example. They were invaluable.

It was suggested that we needed more robust Haz-Mat capabilities. Five Haz-Tec engine companies were created with highly trained members, giving us the ability to respond to and mitigate multiple incidents.

A new Bureau was created to ensure we were prepared for the challenges of our ever-changing world. The FDNY Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness works with our Federal, State and City partners, staying up to date with current threats and planning and conducting response scenarios and drills.

Members of this unit have high-level security clearance as do Ranking Department members who are regularly apprised of threat environments.

Many other large and small adjustments were made to our Department, such as the addition of two state-of-the-art fireboats, drones, robotics, improved communications, changes in counselling and family assistance as well as a World Trade Center Health Program monitoring all members impacted by their response to the attack of 9/11 and their work in the days after.

We certainly have depended upon and continue to depend on the Federal funding that has made these improvements possible and look forward to continued support. Thank you for all that you have done and for conducting this hearing today.

Greg Ehrie, Chief Security Officer

Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

U.S. House of Representatives - Committee on Homeland Security

25 Years Later: Evolutions in Federal, State, and Local Counterterrorism Efforts Since 9/11

September 16, 2026

Good Morning Chairman Garbarino and Members of the Committee, my name is Greg Ehrie and I am the Chief Security Officer of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Port Authority's security programs and preparedness efforts.

Port Authority facilities have the unfortunate distinction of being targeted multiple times by terrorists. In 1993, a truck bomb exploded beneath the North Tower, killing 6 people and injuring more than 1,000.

On September 11, 2001, the Port Authority lost 84 personnel, 37 of which were Port Authority Police Officers. It remains the worst single-day loss of life of any police department in the United States. Since then, we have lost numerous officers due to 9/11 related illness and there are many who are still in the fight.

This tragic legacy has shaped the Port Authority's unwavering commitment to safety and security. This is evident as security accounts for roughly a quarter of both the agency's personnel and its operating budget. Furthermore, since 9/11, \$1.8 billion dollars has been invested in capital projects to harden and strengthen our transportation facilities.

Twenty-five years later, the transportation sector continues to be an attractive target for terrorism. This threat is particularly acute for the Port Authority, given the scale and significance of the critical transportation infrastructure we operate, including the nation's largest airport system, the busiest bus terminal, and most traveled bridge in the world.

The Multi-Layered Security Approach

Since 9/11, the Port Authority has built a risk-based, multi-layered security program designed to protect its employees, customers, and transportation assets from asymmetric threats.

This approach includes:

- Risk and intelligence-informed assessments to identify threats, prioritize vulnerabilities, and guide capital security investments.
- Capital hardening and protective design programs, including tunnel hardening, bridge and structural strengthening, bollards and other vehicle-threat mitigation.

- Security technology, including an extensive CCTV system with enhanced analytics, access-control systems, perimeter intrusion detection, license plate readers, CBRN detection capabilities, drone detection, interoperable radio communications, and continuing evaluation of cutting-edge technologies.
- 24/7 security operations centers and trained contract security officers who provide an additional layer of observation, behavioral recognition, access control, and incident reporting.
- A highly trained police department of more than 2,100 officers, with high-visibility counterterrorism teams, Emergency Service Unit capabilities, and explosive-detection canine teams. PAPD also participates numerous federal, state, and local law-enforcement task forces, including the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces in New York and New Jersey.
- A dedicated Office of Emergency Management that leads incident coordination, training, and full-scale exercises with regional first responders using the Incident Command System and unified command principles.
- A robust cybersecurity program, including a 24/7 Cybersecurity Operations Center, recognizing that physical and cybersecurity are increasingly inseparable in modern transportation systems.

Additionally, we utilize the Department of Homeland Security SAFETY Act program as an independent third-party validation of security programs and technologies. Port Authority facilities and programs that have received SAFETY Act recognition include the World Trade Center, George Washington Bridge, LaGuardia Airport, and PATH.

Recent Regional Events and the 25th Anniversary of 9/11

This year served as an extraordinary real-world stress test for our security protocols, driven by a series of concurrent major events across the New York and New Jersey region. The simultaneous hosting of the FIFA World Cup, Sail 4th, and the America 250 celebrations successfully drew an influx of over 1.2 million additional visitors to the area.

Last week, we gathered to honor and commemorate the 25th anniversary of 9/11. This high-profile event was attended by Vice President Vance, the governors of New York and New Jersey, and several former United States presidents, including Joe Biden, Barack Obama, and Bill Clinton, along with many other dignitaries. Flawless interagency coordination and unparalleled security measures ensured this historic event was among the most protected on record.

Success of these security operations demonstrates what twenty-five years of investment and partnership have produced: a security enterprise that is integrated, intelligence-driven, technologically advanced, and operationalized across jurisdictional boundaries.

How Congress Can Help

Congress has been an essential partner in building and sustaining our security capabilities. We respectfully ask Congress to maintain its support in several key areas.

- Increase federal funding of homeland security grant programs. The Transit Security Grant Program, Urban Area Security Initiative, Port Security Grant Program, and other federal funding have supported Port Authority counterterrorism programs, police training and equipment, emergency preparedness exercises, cybersecurity, access-control systems, facility hardening, and other critical security initiatives. These investments allow state and local partners and transportation agencies to maintain capabilities that protect nationally significant infrastructure.
- Empower states to work with federal partners to perform advanced mitigation against malicious drones. Transportation agencies need timely solutions to support the appropriate response to unauthorized drones impeding transportation operations.
- Continue to support the DHS SAFETY Act program. Independent validation helps organizations measure security programs against best practices and promotes the adoption of effective anti-terrorism technologies and services.
- Protect and strengthen intelligence-sharing and joint task-force capabilities. The ability to move timely, actionable information across federal, state, local, and transportation partners remains one of the most consequential reforms of the post-9/11 era.

Conclusion

Since 9/11, the Port Authority has achieved significant, measurable progress across every layer of our security enterprise. Our facilities are more resilient, our law enforcement capabilities are highly specialized, and Intelligence moves faster. Technology provides tools that did not exist a generation ago. Most importantly, federal, state, and local agencies collaborate in ways that have become routine rather than exception.

On behalf of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, I thank the Committee and our Congressional delegation for their continued support of the programs and partnerships that help us protect our employees, our customers, our infrastructure, and the region we serve.

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**



**25 Years Later: Evolutions in Federal, State, and Local
Counterterrorism Efforts Since 9/11**

John A. Donnelly, Sr.
Fire and EMS Chief

TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD

Before the

U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security
Chairman Andrew Garbarino

September 16, 2026

Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. I am honored to represent Mayor Muriel Bowser, the Government of the District of Columbia, and the more than 2,100 dedicated personnel of the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, as the nation marks 25 years since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

A. Introduction

What happened on September 11 exposed gaps in preparedness, coordination, communication, and command. The memories of that day remain personal and powerful for many of us, and they continue to shape who we are as a Department.

The attacks also reshaped the mission and structure of fire, EMS, and emergency management agencies across the country. For those of us in the National Capital Region (NCR), they fundamentally changed how we coordinate, train, communicate, share intelligence, and prepare for complex threats. Over the past two and a half decades, DC Fire and EMS has transformed from a primarily operational response agency into a fully integrated partner in regional homeland security planning.

We serve a city of roughly 700,000 residents and millions of annual visitors, support events of national importance, and provide pre-hospital medical care as one of the District's largest healthcare providers—because approximately 80 percent of our mission is EMS. In FY24 and FY25, DC Fire and EMS responded to historically high call volumes, averaging more than 575 responses a day and more than 209,000 incidents annually. The scale of our work reflects the demands not only of a thriving city but of the nation's capital, where local public safety and national security responsibilities are deeply intertwined.

B. Chief John A. Donnelly Sr.'s 9/11 25th Anniversary Reflection

1. Position and Role on September 11, 2001

On September 11, 2001, I was a Sergeant with DC Fire and EMS, serving as the Chief's Aide in the 3rd Battalion. I was off duty when the attacks began.

2. Initial Awareness and Response

I first learned of the plane striking the World Trade Center while driving my son, Jack, to school and listening to WTOP. With clear skies over Washington, I initially assumed it was a small aircraft, recalling a similar incident involving the Empire State Building decades earlier.

After dropping him off, I stopped at the local firehouse with my infant daughter, Christina, to check the news. The station was empty, but the television was on. I witnessed the second plane hit the World Trade Center live and immediately recognized the severity of the situation.

Around the same time, I received word of an incident at the Pentagon. My wife—working for Delta Airlines at the airport—reported that the airport had shut down and personnel were being

evacuated. I arranged childcare with a neighbor, packed several days of work clothes, and headed in to report for duty.

3. Actions Taken During the Incident

En route to Engine 15, I contacted Captain Larry Schultz (RS-3) to assess the department's operational posture. Driving north on 295 from Oxon Hill, I observed heavy outbound traffic and only a few vehicles heading toward the city. Many drivers had pulled over to watch the Pentagon smoke plume. I passed DC Fire and EMS Captain Kurt Hoffman, who gave a thumbs-up signal; another inbound vehicle displayed FOP tags.

WTOP soon announced that all DC firefighters and police officers were ordered to report to work immediately.

Upon arriving at Engine 15, Captain Schultz and FF Dwayne Martin of Rescue Squad 3 arrived simultaneously. With E15, RS3, and BFC3 already deployed (E15 at the Pentagon, RS3 held in reserve at the Convention Center, and BFC3 elsewhere), they proceeded to retrieve the reserve Rescue Squad at Engine 25.

(At about this time, the first tower collapsed.)

I began assembling reserve Rescue Squad equipment but was quickly pulled into answering phones in the battalion office. My primary responsibility was supporting the Battalion Chief with staffing and administrative coordination. I helped identify available personnel and assisted the on-duty Firefighting Deputy in placing resources back in service.

Once the reserve Rescue Squad was staffed and equipped, it was dispatched to the Pentagon roughly 45 minutes after my arrival at Engine 15. Although aware of the Pentagon response, most television coverage remained focused on New York.

More personnel arrived throughout the morning. When the Squad was ready to depart, there were more responders than positions available. Captain Schultz asked if I wished to go, noting I had been the first to arrive. After consideration, I chose to remain in the battalion office to maintain staffing and administrative continuity, allowing the regular crew to respond. The Squad left for the Pentagon without me.

Throughout the day, I coordinated staffing, arranged meals for crews, ensured station security, and assisted mutual-aid units. Several hours passed before Chiefs responding from callback began arriving.

4. Long-Term Impact of 9/11 and Career Reflection

The decision to remain in quarters and perform my assigned duties was pivotal in my career. While I regret not being part of the initial response at the Pentagon, I am proud of my choice to support the overall operation.

The events of 9/11 and their aftermath prompted reflection on intelligence sharing, disaster management, preparedness, and command and control. For example, I had no knowledge of Al

Qaeda on 9/11, nor did anyone else. I am committed to ensuring that firefighters are never attacked by unknown adversaries.

In disaster management, I learned the value of strong leadership and the impact a few dedicated individuals can have. DC Fire and EMS lacked executive leadership; resources were stashed, mobilization guidelines had recently changed but members were not informed, regional cooperation was weak, and it felt like there was no plan. Much of what I did that day was improvised.

The Department was unprepared, lacking adequate reserve apparatus to meet community needs and respond to the incident.

In command and control, we had radio communication capabilities with partners but lacked proficiency at the company level and did not integrate well into the Arlington Command Structure.

Following 9/11, Battalion Chief Mike Sellitto selected me to work with him in the Special Operations Division (2002). I used these experiences to help grow special operations over the next decade. My executive skills developed as I managed grant funds, adopted training policies, and navigated the chain of commands.

Ultimately, my experience in the aftermath of 9/11 positioned me to become Fire and EMS Chief in 2020.

C. Perspective from the National Capital Region

The NCR has decades of experience confronting complex emergencies, beginning with the lessons of the 1982 Air Florida crash and reinforced on 9/11. The 9/11 Commission found that although command-and-control challenges occurred during the Pentagon attack, the overall local response was effective because the region had already embraced a formal Incident Command System. That foundation accelerated a broader shift toward regionalization, fundamentally changing how public safety agencies coordinate, train, communicate, and share intelligence.

Over the past twenty-five years, DC Fire and EMS has evolved from a primarily operational response agency into a fully integrated partner in homeland security planning. The Department is built to meet the scale and complexity of the Nation's Capital—serving approximately 700,000 residents and millions of visitors, supporting events of national significance, and delivering pre-hospital medical care on the city's most challenging days.

Since 9/11, DC Fire and EMS has worked side-by-side with the District's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, the Metropolitan Police Department, regional fusion centers, federal agencies, hospitals, universities, and private-sector partners to maintain a unified operating picture. **As a non-law-enforcement agency, we often serve as the voice of the community during security and event planning. Our partners understand, as we do, that terrorism threats move fluidly across jurisdictions, and our collaboration must do the same.**

This integration is sustained through the District Preparedness System, regional Emergency Support Functions, and the Washington Regional Threat and Analysis Center, which together form the region's core planning and information-sharing infrastructure. These advancements represent

one of the most significant improvements in homeland security readiness since 2001, ensuring the NCR responds today with a level of coordination, communication, and shared situational awareness that did not exist a generation ago.

D. Current Preparedness and Capabilities

1. Interagency Coordination and Regional Planning

DC Fire and EMS participate in large-scale planning through the National Special Security Event (NSSE) process, District Preparedness System, and the support Emergency Support Functions, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and rely on the Washington Regional Threat and Analysis Center for shared intelligence. Preparedness today is a continuous cycle of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

DC Fire and EMS's role has evolved in the NSSE process to include co-chairing several committees; an indication of the complexity of the processes and the unique knowledge and leadership provided by the fire and EMS services across the nation. Before 9/11, these types of national events were planned on an *ad hoc* basis at the local level. Typical NSSE event planning now includes over 50 organizations and deployments plans for more than 10,000 personnel.¹

This level of planning and integration happen because of a need to work together to accomplish a goal, a regulatory framework that supports the goal and funding to accomplish the goal. These NSSE events and their management are opportunities for our community to practice large scale events and improves preparedness. An example of an NSSE helping to prepare a community for a disaster is the January 2025 Air Crash into the Potomac River which followed the Inauguration by nine days. Many of the same responders to the air crash played major roles in the Inauguration planning and execution and were able to capitalize on that experience during the plane crash response.

The 2025 Plane Crash is another example of successful regional planning. In the aftermath of the 1982 Air Florida crash, the region's Fire Chiefs came together under the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) to address issues that were identified in Command and Control, Interoperability and Preparedness. The regional mutual aid agreement that was put in place because of those meetings was next tested on 9/11 at the Pentagon. In 2025, the lessons learned, regional agreements, interoperable radio channels, regional equipment caches, and exercises all contributed to a coordinated response to this tragic event that cost 67 lives.

Today the region's Fire Chiefs Committee is comprised of officials from local, state, federal and non-profit organizations within MWCOC. The Committee meets monthly to address issues of regional importance regarding Fire and Rescue policies and practices in the region. The Fire Chiefs Committee oversees several regional technical subcommittees specific to hazardous materials response, technical rescue, public safety communications, emergency medical services, rail safety, firefighter health and safety, life safety, technology, training and bomb squads. Each subcommittee

¹ As an interesting side note, this level of planning happens outside of the National Incident Management System.

consists of individuals with specialized expertise and skills related to the topic, and they work and report on critical issues related to these matters.²

2. Intelligence and Information Sharing

Planning for the threats and hazards we face depends on the quality of information we receive and understanding the consequences and effects of the tactics, techniques and procedures of those that threaten us.

Much of the information/intelligence comes to the fire service through the Fire Service Intelligence Exchange (FSIE), Fusion Centers, and the JTTF. Each of these programs have different roles, with the FSIE being the final mile of information sharing to the fusion centers and actual first responders.

For example, DC Fire and EMS has developed standard operating guidelines for response to weapons of mass destruction by our adversaries. This is because the intelligence community has been able to keep us informed of the most likely WMD we would face based on intelligence collected and analyzed against the intelligence requirements developed by the fire service.

a. Fire Service Information Exchange

In the past, the FSIE briefings included after action reviews of major attacks, including the 2017 mass casualty shooting in Las Vegas, NV. These briefings were a highly effective way of sharing lessons learned within the fire/EMS homeland security community.

In March of 2025, at the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), the US Fire Administration (USFA) ceased hosting the monthly FSIE calls. The Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center (MCAC, Maryland's fusion center) quickly accepted the responsibility of keeping this group going, knowing the value that it provides to the fire service. FSIE now provides a monthly unclassified briefing highlighting significant incidents and emerging trends in terrorism, mass violence, and cybersecurity for fire/EMS and emergency management personnel. As of August 2026, FSIE comprises over 200 members, including leaders in fire/EMS, emergency management, and intelligence from 32 states and the District of Columbia.

FEMA/USFA stepping away has had both positive and negative implications for the reconstituted FSIE.

Positive	Negative
• Fusion center intelligence analysts now manage FSIE, enabling the transformation of shared reporting into actionable intelligence products and briefings—something USFA could not do due to limited authority and training.	• No longer benefits from the same level of national intelligence agency representation it had when federally supported, though DHS WMD intelligence division remains an active participant. • Faces ongoing challenges from limited staffing and technological resources.

² In addition, the Fire Chiefs Committee advises the Emergency Preparedness Council (EPC), the Homeland Security Executive Committee (HSEC) and the Human Services and Public Safety Policy Subcommittee (HSPSPC) on regional issues related to the fire and rescue service.

• MCAC recommends best practices and shares non-federal guidance to advance fire/EMS intelligence analysis. • FSIE's integration with a fusion center strengthens its connection to the National Network of Fusion Centers and enhances advocacy for improved information sharing with fire, EMS, and emergency management.	• Reduced resources have diminished FSIE's capacity to provide assistance, especially compared to FEMA or USFA.
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Nearly 25 years after 9/11 we continue to experience roadblocks to information sharing with fire/EMS and emergency management professionals. FSIE was one of the few federal programs that was specifically intended to break down those barriers, but DHS (which was created for the purpose of sharing information with state/locals) seems to have stepped away from that role.³

In addition to the shutdown of the FSIE, in June of 2025, FEMA/USFA discontinued the Emergency Management & Response Information Sharing & Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC), which shared unclassified intelligence products with over 187,000 first responders throughout the United States. That program remains shut down and impacts first responder ability to receive threat products across critical infrastructure centers. This limits our ability to protect ourselves from cyberattacks or prepare for attacks to our water or electrical supply.

b. Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR)

Fire and EMS personnel play an increasingly important role in identifying pre-operational terrorist activity. Maintaining trust with the public while protecting constitutional rights requires responders to be well-informed and context-aware. In practice, DC firefighters do **not** report routine or benign behavior, such as casual photography, but **do** report behavior that is surreptitious or contextually suspicious at sensitive locations.

Fire/EMS agencies benefit from SAR processes that are standardized, privacy-conscious, and fully integrated with fusion centers. National SAR guidance and training (via DHS/FBI's Nationwide SAR Initiative) improves the quality and consistency of field reporting and has contributed to hundreds of FBI investigations nationwide.

³ Excerpt from Travis Nelson's (MD's Homeland Security Advisory) testimony to the House Homeland Security Committee last year (source link: <https://democrats-homeland.house.gov/imo/media/doc/nelson-02242026.pdf>):

Information sharing is one of the most basic and fundamental services the federal government can provide to states to enhance preparedness. In June 2025, the United States Fire Administration discontinued the EMR-ISAC. The EMR-ISAC shared unclassified intelligence products with a significant distribution list of over 187,000 police officers, emergency managers, firefighters and EMTs. Currently, this resource is unmanaged. In March 2025, at the direction of FEMA Headquarters, the US Fire Administration stopped hosting monthly Fire Service Intelligence Exchange calls. This regularly scheduled call was cancelled without discussion or input from any of the participating agencies. Recognizing the importance of information sharing among this community, the Maryland Fusion Center has managed the calls since then and has been working to expand its reach. Multiple agencies, including the FDNY Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness appreciate the value of these calls and their role in continuing to protect the homeland. Currently, 123 unique agencies from 27 states and D.C. are represented.

c. Integration with Fusion Centers

Effective SAR depends on strong collaboration with regional fusion centers. Fire departments, including DC Fire and EMS, work with fusion centers to:

- Develop tailored outreach materials for recognizing terrorism-related behavior.
- Provide training that ensures responders can identify and appropriately report indicators while upholding civil rights and civil liberties.
- Maintain agency-wide policies, SOPs, and privacy frameworks that institutionalize responsible SAR practices.

d. Joint Terrorism Task Force Representation

The NCR identified a gap in situational awareness within federal counterterrorism operations and successfully added a fire department representative to the FBI Washington Field Office Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF). This role strengthens regional preparedness by:

- Translating fire/EMS capabilities, terminology, and operational realities for federal partners.
- Speeding two-way information flow between the JTTF and regional fire chiefs.
- Ensuring fire/EMS perspectives are incorporated into threat evaluations and operational planning.

The dedicated liaison has produced measurable preparedness gains:

- Advanced adoption of the Incident Command System within FBI operational planning, including use of standardized ICS positions for special events and no-notice incidents.
- Completion of extensive formal and informal federal training, increasing the liaison's value as a subject-matter bridge.
- Graduation from the FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate as a certified WMD Coordinator, enhancing regional response capability.
- Multiple real-world situations where established relationships enabled rapid clarification of potential threats, strengthening long-term interagency trust.

Fire/EMS preparedness also depends on informed communities. Public education programs like **If You See Something, Say Something** enhance local vigilance by teaching behavior-focused reporting (not appearance-based judgments) and aligning outreach with privacy protections. These programs ensure only credible, behavior-based indicators are elevated to law enforcement partners.

3. *Operational Readiness Across All Hazards*

DC Fire and EMS believes that to be prepared to respond to a disaster or terrorist attack, the Department must be ready to handle the everyday mission of Fire and EMS at a high level. To accomplish this DC Fire and EMS is a standard driven organization, having adopted National Fire Protection Association 1500, *Standard on Occupational Safety and Health*. This standard is an umbrella standard that brings in relevant standards and provides a roadmap for assuring that a department has adequate resources, policies, and practices to respond to any type of event

(including a terrorist attack). The results of this approach have resulted in the Department receiving an Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class I Rating and an Utstein Cardiac Arrest Survival rate of 40%.

The Department maintains a high operational tempo and readiness to respond to both conventional and unconventional threats, including:

- Mass casualty incidents
- WMD scenarios
- Cyber/physical impacts on critical infrastructure
- Coordinated attacks
- Complex multisite emergencies
- Hazardous materials emergencies

Our members train year-round and participate in multi-agency exercises that replicate realistic threat conditions. Our workforce has consistently demonstrated its ability to mobilize for large-scale emergencies, including aviation incidents, major public events, and high tempo national security operations.

a. The Role of EMS in Homeland Security

Our experience is that disasters and terrorist attacks are human centered, meaning that the needs of affected citizens are often the largest problem facing responders. While the responsibility for addressing our citizens' needs is a complex web of responsibilities, our experience has shown that Fire and EMS plays the first role and a key role in addressing this challenge. Within the District of Columbia health care ecosystem, and in almost every system around the county, the Fire and EMS department is functionally also one of the largest healthcare providers, delivering life-saving care at the point of injury. The DC Fire and EMS system:

- Provides over 150,000 pre-hospital patient encounters annually
- Administers cutting-edge treatments such as whole blood transfusion in the field
- Has achieved cardiac arrest survival rates that exceed national averages
- Operates Opioid Response Teams and mobile risk-reduction programs
- Integrates EMS data with hospital partners to track outcomes and improve care

Our EMS system is both a public safety asset and a national security asset. Protecting EMS capacity, funding, and interoperability is essential to homeland security because EMS is often the first point of contact for victims of terrorism, mass violence, and complex emergencies.

Congress should clearly understand that cuts to Medicare and Medicaid directly affect the funding received by the Department. It should also be recognized that the reimbursement rates we receive through these programs do not cover the actual costs of delivering the services. Throughout the country these Fire and EMS systems and responsibilities are intertwined and no longer identifiable as separate capabilities.

b. Apparatus Availability

We face challenges in our readiness, like many departments around the country we are struggling with long delivery times and the expense of new fire apparatus. We are currently experiencing two- to five-year wait times for apparatus, and costs for apparatus have doubled in the past 10 years. The IAFC has called on federal policymakers, Congress, and manufacturers to build supply-chain resilience and alleviate production backlogs:

- Component Prioritization: Urging the federal government to work with suppliers to prioritize delivery of critical sub-components (such as chassis, engines, and semiconductors) specifically for fire and EMS apparatus production.
- Voluntary Standardized Models: Partnering with the USFA and manufacturers to design voluntary, standardized fire apparatus models. This limits unnecessary customization, driving down manufacturing complexity and lead times.
- Federal Grant Flexibility: Lobbying for federal grant policies (like FEMA's AFG program) to accommodate multi-year manufacturing queues and incentivize the adoption of standardized designs.
- EVT Education Pipelines: Partnering with the National Fire Academy to establish model educational curricula at technical colleges to train more qualified Emergency Vehicle Technicians (EVTs) to maintain existing aging fleets.

c. Training/Workforce Development

Operational readiness in the fire and EMS service is inseparable from advanced, continuous education. The National Fire Academy (NFA) remains our premier leadership institution, serving the same role for the fire service that Quantico serves for law enforcement. It is where modern fire service leaders are trained, mentored, and developed, and it is foundational to our ability to meet evolving threats.

Within the District, we have built our own preparedness pipeline through programs such as our paramedic training initiative, which will soon produce roughly 70 paramedics annually—enough to sustain our internal operational needs but not enough to close the regional and national paramedic shortage. Expanding programs like this would directly strengthen national healthcare capacity, and federal support for paramedic education represents a direct investment in readiness across the homeland security enterprise.

What is equally important is that fire service professionals show up when opportunities exist. Our employees enroll in every continuing education program made available, from National Fire Academy courses to federal hazardous materials, WMD, bomb response, radiation response, and homeland security programs.⁴ These programs emerged after 9/11 to close critical capability gaps, and the fire service's participation in them whenever slots are available demonstrates a deep commitment to the mission and an eagerness to advance national readiness.

⁴ I have personally completed the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security master's program, advanced WMD and hazardous materials courses in Anniston, radiation response training at the Nevada Test Site, and explosives/suicide bomber response training at New Mexico Tech.

The record is clear: **when training exists, firefighters participate; when advanced coursework is offered, they volunteer; when rigorous homeland security education is available, they fill the seats.** That willingness to learn is an enduring strength of the American fire and EMS service—and Congress should treat it as a strategic asset.

But that asset requires federal investment. Without reliable funding for institutions like the National Fire Academy, and without support for federally sponsored advanced training programs, the fire service's ability to prepare for terrorism, emerging threats, and complex disasters will erode. These programs are national security infrastructure. Every trained paramedic, hazardous materials technician, WMD coordinator, or homeland security graduate directly strengthens the nation's prevention and response posture.

For these reasons, Congress's continued commitment to sustained and expanded investment in fire service training, leadership development, and advanced homeland security education is essential. Firefighters will do their part as they always have, but the nation depends on Congress to ensure those opportunities exist.

4. Technology and Communications

Interoperable communications are fundamental to effective terrorism response. Investments in alerting systems, radio platforms, and digital intelligence applications have significantly improved situational awareness among first responders, regional partners, and the public. Sustained federal investment and engagement are essential to maintain alignment with national standards.

The NCR Radio Cache Program, formally known as the NCR Communications Interoperability Group, provides a regional solution for real-time interoperability challenges. The cache enables rapid expansion of unencrypted public safety radio capabilities during emergencies and planned events. It consists of over 1,200 radios, organized into three sub-caches located in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The cache also includes tactical audio switches, portable repeaters, and specialized equipment for in-building and underground communications. Supported by Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) funds, the program has facilitated over 500 deployments since 2004, with more than 40,000 assets deployed.

Established in 2004 in response to lessons learned from the September 11, 2001, attacks, the NCR Radio Cache was designed to address interoperability gaps identified during major incidents. Over time, the cache has evolved to support planned events, training, and exercises, including National Special Security Events such as presidential inaugurations and large-scale public gatherings. While emergency deployments are infrequent, regional public safety agencies consistently rely on the cache during major incidents. The need for cache radios has grown, now extending to support agencies such as the Joint Task Force NCR during National Special Security Events.

Interoperability within the NCR remains a critical requirement. The cache continues to serve traditional public safety partners and an expanding range of support agencies, ensuring coordinated communications during both routine and extraordinary operations.

E. Federal Support Needed to Sustain Readiness

While the last 25 years have brought enormous progress, several critical needs remain.

a. Rebuilding Fire/EMS Intelligence Capacity

Federal participation in FSIE and EMR-ISAC should be restored or replaced with a modernized national program that recognizes the fire service as a frontline intelligence contributor.

An additional opportunity to assist the nation's fire service in receiving the intelligence it needs to keep our communities safe is funding fire service participation on the Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) at the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC).

The JCAT helps improve public safety by sharing counterterrorism information with federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners. JCAT works in three main areas: producing intelligence reports that reflect partner needs, building relationships and raising awareness through outreach and education, and supporting training and exercises to strengthen counterterrorism efforts.

Initially the program funded the participation of a small number of firefighters from across the nation to be detailed to the program on an annual basis. Compared to law enforcement who has other grant avenues to fund participation of police officers, it was the only way to fund fire department participation. When the funding was discontinued, participation in the program stopped. Fire Department participation was particularly important in this program as it exposed analysts in the intelligence community to the intelligence first responders need to respond safely and efficiently to an attack and provided a different viewpoint than law enforcement to target hazards and potential techniques that help analysts avoid a failure of imagination.⁵

b. Communications, Bandwidth, and Data Transfer Standards

Modern emergency response depends on the ability to rapidly transmit high-volume data (i.e., floor plans, transport and passenger manifests, real-time video, sensor feeds, and intelligence updates) across agencies and jurisdictions. As fire and EMS operations evolve, these data needs are growing exponentially. National fire service partners, including the IAFC, consistently emphasize that communications resilience is now a core component of preparedness, requiring both protected terrestrial bandwidth for first responders and regulated, reliable satellite pathways for continuity when traditional networks fail.

For the NCR, uninterrupted interoperability is essential during National Special Security Events and no-notice incidents. Systems such as FirstNet and NCR-managed public safety communications platforms already push the limits of available bandwidth, and emerging technologies—wearable cameras, encrypted data-sharing apps, real-time building intelligence, and drone video—will increase demand further. To maintain readiness, Congress should provide clear regulatory and funding support for:

- Reserved terrestrial bandwidth for first responders to ensure priority access during high-load emergencies.

⁵ <https://www.odni.gov/about/mission-centers-directorates/nctc/joint-counterterrorism-assessment-team/>

- National standards for satellite communications used by public safety agencies, including reliability, latency, cybersecurity, and automatic failover requirements.
- Data-transfer interoperability standards that allow seamless exchange of large files (video, building intelligence, manifests) across federal, state, and local partners.
- Investment in high-capacity infrastructure, recognizing that emergency communications increasingly require broadband-level data throughput rather than traditional radio-only channels.

These steps would help guarantee that first responders can communicate, share lifesaving information, and maintain situational awareness under all conditions—whether facing cyber disruptions, infrastructure failures, or complex coordinated attacks.

c. Stable and Flexible Homeland Security Grants

The NCR has used UASI grant funding to identify and address risks and vulnerabilities in homeland security and public safety. This funding has enabled local and state partners to make critical investments that would not have been feasible otherwise, including interoperable communications equipment, secure networks for sensitive public safety systems, and specialized equipment for responders across the region. Subject matter experts evaluate these investments for effectiveness, and those deemed essential are transitioned to local funding for ongoing support. Without grant funding, coordinated regional investments at this scale would be difficult to achieve at the local and state level.

Regional investment enhances interoperability. Standardized equipment for first responders enables common operational procedures and practices, facilitating coordinated operations during large-scale emergencies requiring mutual aid.

Federal preparedness grants are the foundation for regional interoperability, intelligence sharing, CBRNE detection, mass notification systems, and responder training. Proposed changes to 2 CFR 200, which would allow federal agencies to terminate grants without warning, even mid-award, create instability and undermine state and local planning. These grants must remain predictable and protected from short-term federal policy changes.

The instability introduced by the proposed rule creates significant risk to essential homeland security capabilities across the District and the broader NCR. Sudden pauses or revocations of grant funding jeopardize critical programs, including:

- Regional intelligence sharing between DC, Maryland, and Virginia
- Emergency mass notification systems
- CBRNE detection equipment
- Regional security video-sharing platforms
- Structural collapse rescue and technical rescue equipment
- Interoperable communications systems
- Regional training, planning, and exercise programs
- Cybersecurity capacity and regional watch desk staffing

These capabilities are directly funded by longstanding federal homeland security grants, and disruptions would have immediate operational consequences.

d. Support for the DCA Air Safety Act

Mayor Bowser has indicated strong support of the [DCA Air Safety Act](#), and I echo her concerns in this testimony for the record. The NCR relies heavily on the safe, efficient operation of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, which serves nearly 25 million passengers each year. Despite this extraordinary volume and longstanding warnings from aviation-safety experts, Congress has repeatedly expanded the number of flight slots at DCA even as the FAA cautioned that airport congestion had reached unsafe levels.

The tragic 2025 mid-air collision over the Potomac River illustrated in the starkest possible terms the consequences of overcrowded airspace, high controller workload, and insufficient separation between mixed flight operations. That incident remains a defining moment for our region's aviation-safety posture. It demonstrated that the airspace surrounding DCA, bounded by restricted federal zones, dense flight patterns, and complex operational requirements, cannot safely sustain continued growth without meaningful reform.

The DCA Air Safety Act responds directly to these findings by reducing hourly operations, eliminating excess flight slots, distributing takeoffs and landings more evenly, and requiring regular reporting to Congress on DCA's safety environment. As Mayor Bowser has emphasized, this legislation reflects the seriousness of Congress's responsibility to keep our airspace safe and prevent tragedies like the 2025 collision from ever happening again.

From the perspective of DC Fire and EMS, this legislation strengthens regional preparedness and mitigates one of the highest-risk operational environments in the NCR. A safer, less congested DCA improves response times, reduces the likelihood of mass-casualty aviation incidents, and aligns with the lessons our agencies continue to apply across every major event we handle. For these reasons, I strongly support the Mayor's position and encourage Congress to advance the DCA Air Safety Act without delay.

F. Conclusion

Twenty-five years after 9/11, protecting our communities from terrorism remains a no-fail responsibility. The District of Columbia Fire and EMS Department is committed to working with federal, state, and local partners to strengthen readiness, reinforce intelligence sharing, support EMS system resilience, and ensure responders have the tools and information needed to meet evolving threats.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony for the record. I welcome the Committee's continued leadership and stand ready to support your work.

APPENDIX A

Success Stories

A. Urban Search and Rescue

FEMA has announced nearly \$55.6 million in FY 2026 funding to support the readiness of the nation's Urban Search and Rescue Task Forces.

Through the National Urban Search and Rescue Readiness Cooperative Agreement, funding will help the 28 task forces within the National US&R Response System train personnel, purchase equipment and supplies, and maintain their ability to deploy when disasters exceed state and local response capabilities.

These teams provide an extraordinary national capability while remaining rooted in the communities they serve. In 2025 alone, National US&R Task Forces deployed to seven major disasters, searched more than 5,000 buildings, and rescued more than 200 people.

B. NCR Communications Interoperability

The attack on the United States Capital on January 6, 2021, and subsequent Presidential Inauguration on January 20, 2021, demonstrated the NCR Communications Interoperability Group programs value in supporting public safety interoperability in the region. The DC, Maryland, and Virginia Teams jointly deployed 1100 radios, tactical repeaters, and interoperability gateways to personnel from the Metropolitan Police, DC Fire and EMS, National Guard, and many other agencies in support of these events. All hazards Communications Unit Leaders and Technicians were provided to support radio communications and ensure interoperability in the region.

The NCRCIG also deployed assets to support multiple special events including cyber security attacks and Line of Duty Death ceremonies. These assets and the communications professionals that assisted proved invaluable to the users in providing critical communications paths and resiliency.

During the 2022 time period, the NCRCIG acquired the Deployable Trunking Systems, which are based on a national standard. These systems further enhance the interoperable communications portfolio that is provided to the NCR and beyond. These units have been used heavily throughout the NCR since they were placed in service in 2023. The continued evolution of the NCRCIG portfolio has further solidified the defined need for the resource, its assets and most importantly the personnel who are specially trained to deploy them.

More recently in early 2025 the NCRCIG was deployed with both personnel and assets to support the response and recovery efforts surrounding the mid-air collision of a US Army helicopter and passenger jet at Washington's Regan National Airport. The NCRCIG supported both NCR and federal partners with interoperable communications systems to ensure seamless communications during the tragedy.

C. Success Stories of the JTTF Fire Department Liaison

Over the past year, the Department has continued to advance the adoption of the Incident Command System, making it a more common and accepted practice within the FBI. Through close collaboration with the Crisis Manager from the Washington Field Office, standard positions such as Operations and Planning are now routinely incorporated into planning and documentation for special events, with the aim of applying these practices to no-notice incidents as well. The Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) Liaison has actively pursued a range of training opportunities—both formal and informal, across various locations—to enhance the value of the liaison role to the FBI.

Progress has also been made in the FBI's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program training, equipping the JTTF Liaison with a deeper understanding of FBI operations during emergency incidents and strengthening the ability of regional fire departments to leverage this federal resource. During the last fiscal year, the JTTF Liaison completed the vetting and training required to be certified by the FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate as a WMD Coordinator.

Additionally, relationships built while serving in the liaison position have facilitated clear communication regarding situations that could have posed potential threats. While most of these situations proved to be well-intentioned, the experience has further strengthened connections for future collaboration.

APPENDIX B

Successful Grant Project Summaries

- Collected UASI project summaries. These summaries represent the UASI sustainment projects, though several of them (DHSPS, NCRnet, Mass Notification, and CAD2CAD) have now transitioned to local funding.



FY25 UASI Project
Summaries FINAL 202

- Project summaries for the other locally funded programs which previously transitioned off UASI funding (the regional public safety programs). These are summaries for AFIS, LPR, IAMS, and NCRGDX. I'm working on getting updated copies of RAPID and LInX as well.



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