



ISSUES FACING NEW YORK CITY’S AGENCIES: FIRE DEPARTMENT OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Overview

The Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) is the largest fire department in the nation, with a Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 budget of \$2.2 billion and approximately 11,000 uniformed and 6,000 civilian employees, including about 4,000 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel. The FDNY maintains 219 firehouses and 37 EMS stations citywide and responds to more than a million emergencies every year. The Department also conducts investigations to enforce public safety codes and provides educational services in fire prevention, life safety and disaster preparedness.

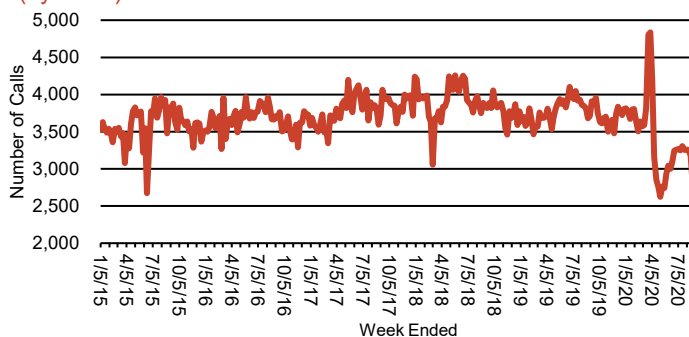
Pandemic Impact on Agency Operations

Immediately following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about one-fifth of firefighters and a quarter of EMS staff were unavailable for duty on medical leave. Meanwhile, medical emergency calls to 911 surged to the highest daily number in FDNY history (over 6,500). In comparison, there was an average of about 3,750 calls daily between 2015 and 2019 (see Figure 1). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided ambulances and trained personnel to help respond to the surge in calls. Call volume following the spike fell below pre-pandemic levels and remains low, caused by a reduction in the City’s daytime population and possibly, a reticence to visit hospitals during the pandemic.

ISSUES FACING THE AGENCY

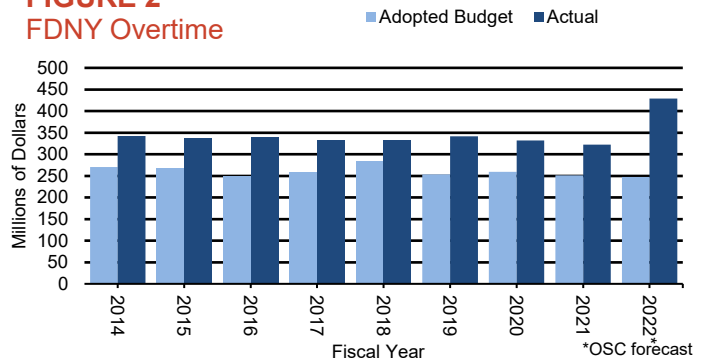
- **Overtime:** FDNY overtime spending has remained relatively level for almost a decade, but the City’s estimates are consistently lower than actual costs. Historically, only the current year’s budget has been adjusted to reflect true spending, and as a result, the City is forced to find additional funding for unfunded overtime costs every fiscal year (see Figure 2). Overtime in FY 2022 is projected to grow to its highest year on record, primarily because of lower-than-planned uniformed staffing levels and high rates of employee unavailability related to the pandemic.
- **Medical Emergency Response:** Medical emergency call volume dropped below pre-pandemic levels in the summer of 2020 and has remained low. However, the Omicron COVID-19 variant has placed many first responders on medical leave, particularly for EMS staff. Omicron and potential future variants could subject more employees to medical leave and severely restrict response capacity if there is another surge in medical emergency calls.
- **EMS Pay Parity:** FDNY EMS personnel are compensated less than other first responders in the City and other EMS departments nationwide. According to the Chief of EMS, many employees apply for the exam for promotion to firefighter in search of higher pay, resulting in higher attrition rates following the exam. The last promotion exam was offered in December 2016; exams are normally administered every four years.

FIGURE 1
Average Daily Medical Emergency Calls
(by week)



Sources: NYC OpenData

FIGURE 2
FDNY Overtime



Sources: Office of Management and Budget; Financial Management System