

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE July 29, 2022

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT **Assessment of Dallas Fire Fighters Association Letter of Concern**

In early June 2022, the Dallas Fire Fighters Association (DFFA) published a letter outlining several areas of concern about working conditions and various operational matters within Dallas Fire-Rescue. Me and my team have reviewed their comments and feedback to assess areas for continued improvement as well as to reflect on the many programs initiatives that have been implemented over the past five years to improve service, enhance firefighter safety, and improve working conditions.

Recently, Deputy City Manager, Jon Fortune, provided me a detailed update and response to the many of the items identified in the DFFA letter. I am sharing this memorandum with the City Council as I thought it provided a great overview on current challenges, on-going initiatives, and recent enhancements to service and working conditions.

Please contact either me or Jon Fortune should you have any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. C. Broadnax', written over a circular stamp or seal.

T. C. Broadnax
City Manager

c: Chris Caso, City Attorney
Mark Swann, City Auditor
Billerae Johnson, City Secretary
Preston Robinson, Administrative Judge
Kimberly Bizer Tolbert, Deputy City Manager
Jon Fortune, Deputy City Manager

Majed A. Al-Ghafry, Assistant City Manager
M. Elizabeth (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira, Assistant City Manager
Robert Perez, Interim Assistant City Manager
Carl Simpson, Interim Assistant City Manager
Jack Ireland, Chief Financial Officer
Genesis D. Gavino, Chief of Staff to the City Manager
Directors and Assistant Directors

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CITY OF DALLAS

DATE July 29, 2022

TO T.C. Broadnax, City Manager

SUBJECT **Dallas Fire Fighters Association (DFFA) Letter of Concern**

In June 2022, the Dallas Fire Fighters Association (DFFA) published a letter identifying several challenges regarding operations and conditions of the Department. I received these comments with an open mind and willingness to constructively assess their feedback.

Over the past 5 years, we have been fortunate to have a positive and collaborative working relationship with Dallas Fire-Rescue (DFR) leadership that has resulted in improved services, increased safety, and better working conditions for firefighters. With that in mind, I wanted to provide you a high-level overview of the issues identified by DFFA and to provide you an update on the progress that has been realized in addressing them.

The Building Services Department (BSD) has worked closely with DFR leadership to address maintenance concerns with facilities in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner. While true that we have experienced HVAC malfunctions, BSD has been responsive to make repairs and, if necessary, implement stop-gap measures such as installing portable cooling systems should parts not be available due to limited supply. Further, BSD has provided a comprehensive plan to expedite the repair of known HVAC issues in stations, which I've recently shared with you.

Unfortunately, many of our facility maintenance issues are due to decades of deferred building maintenance. This trend has recently changed when last year you included a new annual allocation of \$2 million in the DFR budget for maintenance needs above and beyond the Citywide funds also allocated to Building Services. This has allowed DFR to address specific needs such as furniture replacement and kitchen upgrades and has provided the Chief a tool to quickly respond to immediate, unforeseen needs. DFR will continue to work with BSD on plans for more long-term maintenance and upgrades.

As you know, we are also progressing on various fire station construction projects after the city was struck with multiple natural disasters and the global pandemic that caused nationwide supply shortages and delivery delays. The following is an update on current construction projects:

- Repairs to the burn house training prop at the Training Academy have been completed, and live burn training has resumed. Repairs to the other live-fire training props are currently being scheduled for completion early next year.
- Fire Station 30 (11381 Zodiac Ln.) reopened July 2022
- Fire Station 59 (201 N. Jim Miller Rd.) opened July 2022

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- Fire Station 58 (9393 Water Mill Rd.) is scheduled to be completed in August 2022
- Temporary Fire Station 41 (5807 Royal Ln.) is scheduled to be completed by this August 2022
- Fire Station 36 (2300 Singleton Blvd) is scheduled to be completed in December 2022
- Fire Station 19 (5600 E. Grand Ave) is scheduled to be completed by March 2023
- Fire Station 41 (5920 Royal Ln) is scheduled to be completed in November 2023

The progress on these projects is a direct result of diligent work by DFR and other City departments to collaborate with contractors to overcome multiple barriers. DFR looks forward to increased operational performance and effectiveness as these projects are completed.

At the time of the DFFA letter, DFR was experiencing a significant number of fire apparatus that suffered malfunctions in their climate control systems. Twelve (12) fire engines (out of 80 front line heavy apparatuses) reported non-functioning A/C systems; and eleven (11) were subsequently repaired. Since that time, additional reports of A/C issues have been provided to the Fire Maintenance Shop who continues to make repairs as quickly as possible. The ability to maintain staffing in the Fire Maintenance Shop and supply chain difficulties continue to challenge the department's fleet maintenance operations. DFR is currently assessing the pay structure for fleet mechanics to stabilize staffing fluctuations and is developing a contingency plan for the most effective way to temporarily replace front-line apparatus that may be down for maintenance or repair.

In my 30 plus years of managing municipal organizations, I can honestly say there is not a more complex payroll structure than that of a firefighter. For example, in addition to base salary, firefighters also receive certification, assignment and education pay. They have unique work schedules such as 24hrs on and 48hrs off that trigger certain Wages and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) overtime requirements and considerations; and though greatly improved with the current Meet and Confer agreement, their step structure results in payroll changes that occur daily. These are just a few of the reasons that DFR payroll is complex beyond that of any other City department.

We strive to ensure that all DFR members are paid properly in accordance with the current Meet and Confer agreement and FLSA requirements. As unique challenges arise, they are addressed as quickly as possible, and some are easier to resolve than others. For example, in February 2022, due to a change in law enacted by the State of Texas legislature in June 2021, we retroactively changed the practice related to calculation of overtime for Q-Leave and COVID-19 Leave. This change resulted in two immediate issues. First, the city needed to identify members that did not earn attendance incentive leave in a quarter where they used Q-Leave or COVID-19 Leave and credit that leave time. Second, since Q-Leave and COVID-19 leave were treated like sick time and not included as productive hours for the calculation of overtime, retroactive adjustments to pay overtime were needed. The Human Resources Department (HR) and City Controller's Office (CCO) payroll team worked on both issues concurrently. All attendance

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incentive leave has been credited to DFR members. The retroactive pay for overtime was much more complicated as the adjustments had to be calculated for each individual employee for each pay period. The retroactive overtime analysis is complete and approximately 600 DFR members were paid retroactive overtime pay this past week.

I also wanted to highlight for you the significant improvements that have been made to the DFR payroll processing under your direction:

- In July 2020, the Workday payroll system went live. Workday is a modern payroll system that can better handle the complexities of DFR's 28-day payroll cycle for overtime. The city is also implementing a timekeeping system called TeleStaff, which is specifically designed to handle uniform payrolls.
- Beginning in August 2020, CCO assumed responsibility for most payroll functions previously managed by HR. You approved this payroll reorganization which created 3 separate payroll teams:
 - A **uniform** team consisting of a manager and four (4) team members. Prior to the reorganization there was not a team focused solely on the uniform (DPD/DFR) payroll.
 - A civilian team consisting of a manager and four (4) team members
 - A time-tracking team consisting of a manager and three (3) team members
- With the reorganization, a Sr. Program Manager position was created. The current Assistant Director of Payroll and Accounts Payable is a Certified Payroll Professional. The current Program Manager has more than 30 years of experience managing payrolls for organizations with more than 60,000 employees.
- The CCO uniform payroll team works closely with the DFR departmental payroll group. Multiple audits are performed by CCO uniform payroll every pay period to ensure that all employees are paid correctly. The overall payroll error rate is less than 0.2% for fiscal year 2022.
- The CCO Payroll Accounting Manager meets bi-weekly with the Dallas Police and Fire Pension Plan (DPFPP) and their CFO to ensure that all DFR member contributions are reconciled and remitted timely.

As it relates to references for health care coverage or other problems with customer service, the DFFA letter lacks detail of the specific issues being referenced. The HR department keeps detailed logs of all benefits issues reported by employees via phone and email and the HR Director reviews the log daily. While they may be unreported, the logs do not reflect errors in coverage as referenced in the DFFA memo. In addition, HR staff has diligently worked with the City Attorney's Office (CAO) and leadership to update and maintain City policies in alignment with best practices and serves as a resource to others in the region.

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Here are some of the initiatives implemented by the HR teams to improve insurance coverage and customer service.

Customer Service

- Reorganized the Benefits team to provide support more appropriately to employees, and added additional Benefits Specialist to the Benefits Team
- Contracted with Employee Benefits Corporation (EBC) as our enrollment support team
- Added additional Benefits support from Blue Cross Blue Shield (health insurance) and The Standard (life insurance)
- Split the Benefits and Wellness role to provide additional support and specialization in each component
- Added Wellness representative support
- Added Service Level Agreements to Benefits representatives to establish customer service standards for response time to email and to calls from employees

Benefit Enhancements

- Increased basic City paid Life Insurance from \$50,000 to \$75,000
- Added Employer paid Long-Term Disability
- Reduced the Short-Term Disability effective eligibility wait time frame from 180 days to 90 days (voluntary benefit)
- Added Child Care Subsidy Benefit program
- Added Health Savings Account (HSA) Plan in 2020 (high deductible plan, providing employer contributions to HSA)
- Added PCP Co Pay Plan in 2021 (lower employee contribution rates)
- Tiered the PCP and PPO 2021 plans adding salary bands for employee related contributions to create equity in employee premium payments for lower wage employees
- Added voluntary benefits 2022 (effective 2023 benefit year) Legal Shield, Pet Insurance, employee entertainment, and banking support (PNC Bank)
- Added Retiree insurance Comeback Option effective January 2022
- Added Paid Parental Leave of up to six weeks for employees who have added a child twelve years or younger to the family.

With the adoption of the 2019-2022 Meet and Confer agreement that you encouraged and supported, we were able to move the pay structure for public safety personnel to a competitive market-based system that lowered attrition and improved recruitment. This represented a significant and necessary change from the much more complex and confusing systems that had been in place prior to your appointment as City Manager.

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As you know management is currently in negotiations with the police and fire employee associations on a new agreement to carry us beyond 2022. While initially our ability to discuss pay was limited by the lawsuit filed by the associations, I am happy to report that they have dismissed their lawsuit. We are currently conducting our remaining negotiation sessions and expect to have a tentative agreement by the end of August.

In any organization as large and complex as DFR, there are inherently going to be challenges, and while the DFFA letter identifies only a few issues, I wanted to provide you additional information regarding accomplishments, initiatives, and programs benefitting DFR that you have supported over the last 5 years. In reviewing the list, your continued support has substantially helped to better the department and improve services to our residents.

- **(2017) DFR Receives Top Tier ISO Rating** – DFR received the Class 1 Insurance Services Organization (ISO) rating. Class 1 rating represents the highest rating a city can receive and signifies top tier preparedness via, available fire resources, training, water supply, etc. Class 1 ratings also mean lower homeowner insurance rates for residents.
- **(2017) Successfully Addressed the Solvency Concerns of Dallas Police and Fire Pension System**
- **(2018) Settled Decades Old Pay Referendum Lawsuit for Police and Fire**
- **(2018) RIGHT Care** – Implemented the RIGHT Care program (Rapid Integrated Group Health Care) as a non-law enforcement strategy to provide clinical and medical response to individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis. The RIGHT Care program has reduced arrests and involuntary hospitalizations. While improving service to our residents, this alternate response program has also made our first responders more efficient in how they respond to high priority calls.
- **(2018) 911 Backup Communications Center** – Created and established an effective and functioning 911 Backup Communications Center. **An effective contingency operation did not exist prior to 2018.**
- **(2018) Priority Dispatch for DFR** – Began implementation of the Priority Dispatch program to improve response times and more efficient response to emergency calls.
- **(2018) EMS Strategic Deployment Model** – DFR implemented the strategic deployment model for the EMS system to ensure efficient and effective deployment of EMS resources to emergency calls.

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- **(2019) Public Safety Meet & Confer (Market Pay)** – Successfully negotiated with public safety employee associations to reach consensus on a Meet and Confer Agreement that established a new market-based pay philosophy focused on reducing attrition and increasing recruitment. Following the successful adoption of the Agreement, developed and implemented a new Police and Fire command staff pay schedule to provide uniformity and consistency with the adopted pay schedules in the agreement.
- **(2019) Text to 911** – This feature was implemented in 2019 to provide an alternative way in which residents can contact DPD or DFR during an emergency.
- **(2019) DFR Highway Blocker Program** – To improve first responder safety and reduce and prevent costly damage to fire equipment that is frequently hit while responding to highway traffic accidents, a new Highway Blocker program was implemented in 2019. The new program utilizes end-of-life fire engines especially equipped with directional lighting to stage in such a way to protect first responders and front-line equipment from being hit.
- **(2019) Enhanced Firefighter Safety** – The FY 19-20 Adopted Budget included the purchase of a second set of bunker gear for firefighters, additional cleaning equipment and replacement of outdated Self - Contained Breathing Apparatus.
- **(2021) DFR EMS Quality Management Program** – Implemented the expansion of the DFR EMS quality management team, launched the first phase of a new field training program and modified the Electronic Patient Care Reporting module to improve the level of patient care.
- **(2021) DFR EMS Single Stream Paramedic Pilot Initiative** – Established a pilot program to improve response times by dedicating single purpose paramedics to peak EMS call zones and times.
- **(2021) DFR Dispatch Accreditation** – DFR Dispatch received accreditation from the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) as an Accredited Center of Excellence for Emergency Dispatching.
- **(2021) 911 Call Center Service Improvements** – Developed a plan to increase call taker pay, added an additional 62 call center staff, redeployed existing personnel, and through targeted hiring events was able to dramatically improve staffing levels restoring service levels to national standards.
- **(2022) Created a DFR team of On-Staff Psychologists** – Designed to help DFR members face stressful situations and traumatic events that place them at a higher risk for mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic disorder.

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- **Multiple-Years) Enhanced Fire Protection** – Since 2017, DFR has added 6 new and/or replacement fire stations (complete and/or currently under construction).
- **(Multiple-Years) Enhanced EMS Service:**
 - 2018 - Created an additional full-time EMS Rescue Unit and one peak demand EMS Rescue Unit.
 - 2019 - additional EMS resources were added to DFR. This included a new front-line rescue that was placed into service at Station 18 downtown.
 - 2021 - addition of another full-time EMS Rescue, replacing 35 EMS Rescue vehicles, and funding for additional paramedic training to ensure that all fire personnel have paramedic certification.
- **(Multiple Year) Equipment Purchases** - Over the past 5 years, DFR has been able to purchase \$73.8 million worth of new equipment for a total of 176 new vehicles. This includes:
 - 33 Fire Engines
 - 17 Trucks
 - 92 Ambulances
 - 34 General Fleet Vehicles

In conclusion, I have carefully reviewed and reflected on the referenced DFFA letter. While I believe we have room for improvement and should continuously strive to improve, I am proud of the programs implemented and efforts of our team to serve both the employees of DFR and our residents. Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to sharing further updates of our progress and innovations as we move forward.



Jon Fortune
Deputy City Manager

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