

Testimony of Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson
NYC Council Committee of Fire and Emergency Management

Hearing – September 19, 2022

Good morning and thank you to Chairperson Ariola, the members of the Fire and Emergency Management Committee, Council Member Riley, and members of the Black, Latino, Asian Caucus for convening this important hearing today. The FDNY is a critical part of our city's emergency response and ensuring that there is an appropriate level of diversity and equity in the department is essential to ensuring that the department operates as well as it can. I am proud to support the passage of the five bills the committee is considering today.

Shortly after I became Borough President this past January, I witnessed firsthand the FDNY's bravery and heroism. The Twin Parks North West fire on January 9 was a catastrophe that took the lives of 17 of our neighbors in the Bronx. But without the intervention of the FDNY, that number would have undoubtedly been higher. We owe our firefighters our deep gratitude for their actions that day and every day that they run into the line of fire to protect all of us.

The FDNY has however unfortunately also long been recognized as one of the least diverse agencies in our city government. While strides have been made over the past few years, diversity has mostly increased in the non-uniform personnel, leaving uniformed firefighters overwhelmingly white and male. Uniformed firefighters are 76 percent white and approximately 99 percent male – of the 11,000 uniformed firefighters, only 137 are women. This disparity is only magnified at the highest level of the uniformed service, with the leadership being almost exclusively white and male. We must make more opportunities for people of color and women to join the FDNY uniformed ranks and serve their communities.

The City Council has long sought to improve diversity in the FDNY. In 2014, I was a proud supporter of Int 579, which was enacted as Local Law 49 of 2015. This law required reporting on the racial and gender makeup of applicants for firefighter civil service examinations at every step of the process from applicants to academy graduates. Since then, we have seen small improvements in the percentage of test-takers invited to the academy be women and people of color. However, there is still a long road to go to achieve the city's goals. The FDNY has stated

that the department will achieve racial parity with the city as a whole in the next three to four testing cycles and will achieve a level of 10 percent for women firefighters over the same period.

The FDNY has been increasing its outreach and recruitment efforts in underrepresented communities. For example, the department made a concerted effort to reach out to the Asian-American community during the previous testing cycle. During Fiscal Year 2021, the FDNY had a recruitment budget of over \$5.6 million.

The five bills that the committee is considering today will help improve diversity, equity, and access in the department. I am proud to have introduced two of these bills alongside Councilmember Kevin Riley.

Int 552 would require the FDNY to submit to the Mayor, City Council Speaker and publicly post an annual report on the number of officers and uniformed members assigned from each firehouse disaggregated by gender and race. They would also have to report on the makeup of the neighborhood that the firehouse covers, disaggregated by gender and race.

Int 553 would require the FDNY to develop and implement a plan for providing ongoing annual training and education to all uniformed members and staff regarding harassment, diversity, and inclusion. The FDNY would also be required to publicly report on their efforts to accomplish this goal.

The other bills would require the FDNY to implement a plan to ensure racial and gender parity in the department with the city as a whole, report on the number of EEO complaints, and survey each firehouse about needed upgrades to ensure a safe working environment for a mixed-gender workforce.

It is essential that we enable all New Yorkers to have the opportunity to join the FDNY and thrive in their jobs while serving their communities. Having uniformed personnel reflect the makeup of the communities that they serve helps to build trust and community support. These bills will help to get us to these goals. I am proud to partner with the members of the City Council to support these bills and I urge their swift passage into law.