



Pittsburgh Fire Fighters IAFF Local No. 1

120 Flowers Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15207 | info@pittsburghfirefighters.org

June 8, 2026

Testimony Before the Pennsylvania Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

Hearing on Fire Apparatus Procurement Challenges Facing Pennsylvania Fire Departments

Chair Mastriano, Minority Chair Muth, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding a growing threat to public safety in Pennsylvania, the unprecedented cost, and delayed delivery of fire apparatus.

My name is Timothy Leech, and I am appearing today on behalf of the Pittsburgh Fire Fighters IAFF Local No. 1.

When Pennsylvanians dial 911, they expect a fire engine, ladder truck, rescue company, or ambulance to arrive quickly and reliably. They do not expect that the vehicle responding to their emergency may be twenty years old, operating beyond its intended service life, or awaiting replacement because a new apparatus will take four years to build and cost twice what it did just a decade ago.

Unfortunately, this is the reality many fire departments are facing today.

This issue is affecting every community in Pennsylvania. From cities like Pittsburgh where I work, to growing suburban communities, to small boroughs and rural townships that depend heavily on volunteer and combination departments. Regardless of geography, departments across the Commonwealth are confronting the same challenge. Replacing emergency vehicles has become dramatically more difficult.

The consequences extend far beyond budgets and procurement schedules. They directly impact firefighter safety, emergency response capabilities, and ultimately the safety of the citizens of this Commonwealth which you represent.

Over the last ten years, the cost of fire apparatus has increased at a staggering rate.

A standard fire engine that cost around \$500,000 ten years ago now routinely costs more than \$1 million. Ladder trucks that once cost roughly \$1 million frequently exceed \$2 million today. In some jurisdictions, departments are receiving bids that are substantially higher than those figures. These increases have dramatically outpaced inflation and have created severe financial burdens for local governments and fire departments.

For municipalities that are already operating on strained budgets, these burdens are devastating.

When the cost of a fire engine doubles, there is no simple way to make up that difference. Fire companies are forced to postpone purchases and delay fleet replacement schedules,

causing them continue operating aging apparatus long after they should have been retired.

Unfortunately, higher prices are only part of the problem. Even when a department can afford a new vehicle, it may have to wait years to receive it.

Historically, a fire department could reasonably expect delivery of a new apparatus within twelve months. Today, delivery schedules of two, three, or even four years are increasingly becoming common throughout the country.

Think about what that means from a public safety perspective.

If a department identifies today that one of its ladder trucks must be replaced, that department may not receive the replacement until 2030. If an engine is damaged in an accident or suffers a catastrophic mechanical failure, there may be no practical way to quickly replace it.

Many departments are therefore forced to keep apparatus in service well beyond their recommended life cycles. In one neighborhood in Pittsburgh we are right now operating a front line engine that is thirty-six years old. These vehicles experience more breakdowns and are increasingly unreliable during emergency operations.

Firefighters understand that equipment fails over time. What is different today is that departments often have no realistic replacement option.

The problem is not theoretical.

In Pittsburgh recently, a fire engine broke down and we had no spare to replace it. The City was forced to put a pickup truck in its place for about a week. Think about that, your house is on fire, your family member is trapped inside, you call 911 and four firefighters show up with a pickup truck. No water to put the fire out, and no ladders to rescue your family members.

That story is becoming increasingly common.

What makes these developments especially concerning is that they are occurring during a period when fire departments face growing demands and increasingly complex emergencies.

Firefighters today are responding not only to structure fires, but also to severe weather events, flooding, technical rescues, hazardous materials incidents, urban wildland fires, and an ever increasing volume of emergency medical calls. The expectation placed on fire departments continues to grow. Yet the tools needed to meet those expectations are becoming harder to obtain.

The International Association of Fire Fighters has become increasingly concerned that these conditions are not simply the result of inflation or lingering supply chain disruptions.

Over the past decade, the fire apparatus manufacturing industry has undergone significant consolidation.

A market that once consisted of approximately two dozen manufacturers has been reduced to three dominant companies, which together control roughly two-thirds of the American fire apparatus market. Many of these consolidations involved acquisitions of longstanding independent manufacturers by larger corporations and private equity backed entities. As competition has declined, prices have increased dramatically and delivery delays have grown longer.

In May 2025, the IAFF joined the American Economic Liberties Project in formally requesting that the United States Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission investigate whether consolidation within the fire apparatus industry has reduced competition and contributed to rising prices and extended delivery times. The concerns raised in that request are significant.

Federal lawmakers from both political parties have begun asking difficult questions. And this issue has attracted bipartisan attention because public safety is not a partisan issue.

Whether a firefighter wears a firefighter patch in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Scranton, Erie, Allentown, Lancaster, or a small Pennsylvania borough, the challenge remains the same. When emergency vehicles become unaffordable and unavailable, communities are placed at risk.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this crisis is what it means for operational readiness. Every apparatus that remains in service beyond its intended lifespan increases the likelihood of mechanical failure. Every delayed replacement increases maintenance costs. Every breakdown places firefighters and citizens at greater risk.

When a fire truck is unavailable, departments must rely on reserve apparatus, mutual aid resources, or neighboring communities to fill the gap. While mutual aid is an essential component of emergency response, it should not become a substitute for properly equipping local departments.

Pennsylvania's fire service already faces significant workforce challenges. Many volunteer departments struggle with recruitment and retention. Municipal governments face budget constraints. Career departments are managing increasing call volumes and staffing pressures. In Pittsburgh we are apprehensively watching a decline in applications for the fire department.

Adding an apparatus crisis on top of those existing challenges creates a dangerous combination.

It's also important to note that apparatus replacement costs affect more than just vehicle purchases. When departments spend larger portions of their budgets on apparatus acquisition, fewer resources remain available for firefighter training, equipment, facility improvements, recruitment initiatives. In other words, every dollar lost to excessive apparatus costs is a dollar unavailable for other emergency preparedness needs.

The good news is that policymakers can help.

First, Pennsylvania should continue expanding grant opportunities that support apparatus replacement.

Second, lawmakers should explore innovative financing programs that help departments manage extraordinary capital expenses.

Third, Pennsylvania should continue advocating for robust federal oversight of the fire apparatus marketplace to ensure competition remains strong and taxpayers receive fair value.

Fourth, policymakers should evaluate opportunities to strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity and workforce development initiatives that support emergency vehicle production.

Finally, the Commonwealth should continue working closely with fire service organizations, municipal leaders, emergency management officials, and federal partners to identify additional solutions.

The goal should be straightforward, ensure that every Pennsylvania community has access to modern, reliable emergency apparatus when it is needed.

The men and women of Pennsylvania's fire service stand ready to respond to emergencies at any hour, under any conditions, and often at great personal risk. They deserve apparatus that is equal to that mission.

Most importantly, the people of Pennsylvania deserve a fire service that has the equipment necessary to protect their families, their homes, their businesses, and their communities.

This apparatus crisis is real. It is growing. And if left unaddressed, it will continue to undermine emergency preparedness throughout our Commonwealth.

I thank the Committee for their attention to this important issue and thank you for your continued support of Pennsylvania's firefighters.

I would be pleased to answer any questions.