



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

Order for a Hearing Regarding Immediate Replacement Funding for Boston Firefighter Cancer Screenings, Health Screenings, Mental Health Supports, and Safety, Health and Wellness Programming Before the FY27 Budget Vote

WHEREAS, Boston firefighters face extraordinary occupational health risks, including repeated exposure to smoke, toxins, carcinogens, traumatic incidents, hazardous materials, extreme physical stress, and dangerous emergency conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Boston Fire Department has repeatedly reported that the average life expectancy for firefighters after retirement is approximately five years, an alarming reality that demands urgent action on cancer prevention, early detection, behavioral health, injury prevention, and firefighter health and wellness; and

WHEREAS, during the Boston Fire Department's FY27 budget hearing, the Department reported that it has received Assistance to Firefighters Grant funding since 2017, and that this funding has supported critical Safety, Health and Wellness efforts, including firefighter skin cancer clinics and comprehensive body scans; and

WHEREAS, during the hearing, the Department stated that the total Assistance to Firefighters Grant award has been approximately \$1.4 million, generally split between the Training Division and Safety, Health and Wellness, and that the Department did not receive this grant funding this year; and

WHEREAS, the Department testified that the loss of this grant creates serious uncertainty about how the City will continue to provide the level of services needed to ensure firefighters receive adequate screening, early detection, and health supports to prevent occupational cancers and other serious health conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Department reported that firefighter skin cancer clinics screened 587 members, resulting in 94 referrals for further treatment and 2 potential melanomas identified, demonstrating the life-saving importance of early detection; and

WHEREAS, the Department also reported that 711 firefighters received comprehensive body scans, including imaging, blood work, urinalysis, and low-dose CT scans, with findings identifying 637 high-risk cases and 413 cardiovascular issues, allowing members to seek early intervention; and

WHEREAS, the Department further explained that this cancer screening and health screening work has been developed despite not being funded through the Department's regular operating budget, and that a prior \$100,000 re-appropriation was used to help support recent cancer screening through United Diagnostics; and

WHEREAS, firefighter cancer screenings, comprehensive body scans, mental health supports, physical therapy, injury prevention, nutrition, and other Safety, Health and Wellness services are not extras. They are necessary supports for firefighters whose work places them at elevated risk of occupational cancer, cardiovascular disease, traumatic stress, physical injury, and early death; and

WHEREAS, the City of Boston should not allow these services to lapse because a federal grant was not awarded. The City must identify replacement funding to ensure firefighters continue to receive the screenings, mental health supports, and wellness services they need to stay healthy and safe; and

WHEREAS, because the FY27 budget process is underway and the Council must vote on the budget before the end of June, this matter requires immediate attention before final budget decisions are made;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED, that the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold an emergency hearing prior to the Council's FY27 budget vote to discuss immediate replacement funding and long-term sustainable funding for Boston Fire Department firefighter cancer screenings, comprehensive health screenings, behavioral health and mental health supports, physical therapy, injury prevention, nutrition, and Safety, Health and Wellness programming previously supported by Assistance to Firefighters Grant funding; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that representatives from the Boston Fire Department, Boston Firefighters Local 718, the Office of Budget Management, the Mayor's Office, the Boston Public Health Commission, and any other relevant departments or stakeholders be invited to testify; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that the hearing include discussion of immediate and long-term funding options, including but not limited to supplemental appropriations, dedicated operating budget line items, grant replacement funding, public health partnerships, reserves, and other available city resources to ensure these health and safety programs are not dependent on uncertain or temporary federal grant funding; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED, that the hearing identify the amount of funding needed to replace the lost Assistance to Firefighters Grant support and prevent any lapse in firefighter cancer screenings, comprehensive health screenings, mental health supports, physical therapy, nutrition, injury prevention, and related Safety, Health and Wellness services in FY27.

Filed in Council: May 20, 2026