

**New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection
February 7, 2023**

Testimony by Commissioner Jackie Bray

Good morning. Thank you, Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee.

My name is Jackie Bray. I am the Commissioner of the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services.

It's my honor to share with you the vision and goals of our agency, as well as provide an overview of the Executive Budget as it relates to our mission.

The hazards and risks the people of New York face are accelerating and intensifying due to climate change, domestic and international extremism, cyberattacks, and even the threat of future pandemics.

In Western New York alone we have seen all of these come to fruition - some in the most dire of ways - this year. Within the past ten months we responded to multiple cyber-attacks, a domestic terror attack that took the lives of ten New Yorkers, an attack from a homegrown violent extremist, a record setting snow fall, and a devastating once in a generation blizzard.

Regardless of the threat we at the Division are the coordinators, the trainers, the facilitators -- the ones who ensure that our local partners have the resources they need to keep their communities safe. It is our job to have everyone else's backs and right now, that job is more important than ever.

Thanks to the leadership of Governor Hochul, the Executive Budget provides the resources necessary for the Division to carry out our mission.

Our total agency appropriation in the Executive Budget is \$9 billion, which includes an additional \$4 billion in authority for the Division to administer federal funding for the expected reimbursements from the COVID-19 federal disaster.

It also includes \$63 million in new appropriations to strengthen the volunteer fire service and support the continued expansion of cyber security and critical infrastructure protection.

Of New York's over 1,700 fire departments, more than 1,600 are volunteer departments. Many of these departments have struggled in recent years to recruit and retain the volunteers needed to keep the rest of us safe. In fact, in a survey 76% of all volunteer fire departments in New York State reported a drop in volunteer service in recent years.

We are going to make the investments and changes necessary to put the volunteer fire service on a path to stability.

The Governor's Executive Budget includes two measures to help us get there. The budget proposes \$10 million to create a Volunteer Firefighter Training Stipend to assist firefighters in obtaining the training they need.

And the proposal seeks to amend the law to enable municipalities to provide nominal stipends of their own to volunteer firefighters for emergency response.

These investments build upon the work we have been doing to prioritize first responders. Last year we rolled out new workshops to support emotional resilience amongst first responders and rolled out new investments targeted to help lower the cancer risk for fire fighters.

This budget also invests \$20 million to strengthen 911 operations and begins to provide what will be required for our counties and localities to join the transition to NextGen 911.

We must also continue the pivot of our homeland security strategies from a post-9/11 mindset to one that recognizes and responds to the diversified threat environment of today.

We've already started by adding the new Domestic Terrorism Prevention Unit to the Office of Counter Terrorism and expanding our Cyber Incident Response Team to provide cyber security as a service to counties and localities. This budget includes additional resources to continue and strengthen that work.

I am particularly proud to have launched the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Unit this past year. This team is working to provide the training, resources, and technical assistance communities need to confront the threat of domestic violent extremism head on. White supremacist and antisemitic violent extremism remain the greatest terrorist threats to New York State this year, as they were last year. Governor Hochul has focused on combating the hate that leads to this extremist violence and we are proud to do this work under her leadership.

It is impossible to address all the fantastic work of the Division during this testimony.

As you all know, there's been a lot going on in emergency response – be it managing weather events, hazmat incidents, terrorist threats, cyberattacks, or digging into the preparedness, public safety, mitigation, and recovery work that is so essential before and after an emergency, it's been a long and busy year for all of us at this agency.

I'm proud of the work that's been done by our teams to keep New Yorkers safe.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

And I am glad to answer any questions you have.

Thank you.