

TESTIMONY OF
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NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Good afternoon. My name is Joseph Colangelo, I am the President of Local 246, SEIU. I represent 1,377 auto trade workers employed by the City of New York. I want to thank this committee for holding this hearing on such an important matter. I am here to voice my genuine concern over the deterioration of the City's ability to maintain and repair its essential motorized fleet. And I am here to shed light on the City's wasteful and potentially dangerous new efforts to utilize private vendors to repair sophisticated and complicated equipment and to replace experienced auto mechanics with my union's auto service worker title. A title which is not trained or qualified to perform auto repair work.

Before I detail my concerns, I want to provide you with a brief outline of my background. I began my career with the New York City Department of Sanitation in 1981 as a Senior Auto Service Worker and a member of SEIU NYC Local 246. Three years later in 1984, I was promoted to Auto Mechanic. I worked as an auto mechanic for 43 years. In 20 years in the garage at Sanitation I worked on every piece of Sanitation equipment. During this period of time I worked my way up the ranks of the union until I became president in 2004. In addition, I am currently a Vice Chair of the New York City Municipal Labor Committee and

- Chairman of the Municipal Labor Sub - Committee on Civil Service
- Chairman of the Civil Service Coalition of Building Trades and Municipal Union
- A member of NYC Central Labor Council Executive Board

I grew up in Queens, New York. I attended Aviation High School and Teterboro School of Aeronautics receiving an Aircraft, Airframe and Power Plant license. I also obtained my Private Pilot's license in 1999.

The testimony and reports that will be submitted to this committee today will only just begin to show the problems with Fleet Services. What is going to be presented today is only the tip of the iceberg.

I have provided a handout that you may wish to look at during my testimony. It should help you understand the seriousness of these problems.

My members repair and maintain all Department Sanitation vehicles such as salt spreaders, dual bin collection trucks, street sweepers, and snow equipment. In the Fire Department we repair all vehicles including pumpers, ladder trucks, ambulances and utility trucks. In the Police Department we repair patrol cars, emergency service trucks, bomb protection vehicles and more. For the Department of Environmental Protection, we repair sewer vacuum trucks, environmental safety trucks and an array of other sophisticated vehicles. In fact, we repair all vehicles from every City agency. These vehicles serve on the front line in protecting our citizens in snow storms, fires, medical emergencies, civil unrest, law enforcement, public health, and sanitation. I fear that the City's fleet is not being properly maintained to meet these critical public functions.

The life blood for all vehicles is their proper maintenance. It goes without saying that the older the vehicle, the more work is required to keep them running. And the City's wide variety of vehicles -- many of which require specialized expertise to maintain and repair- demand an experienced and specialized workforce of which outside vendors cannot provide.

As you are aware, over recent years the City's fleet has been consolidated into DCAS. DCAS reports that the City owns and operates over 30,000 vehicles, many of which require specialized skills and expertise to repair and maintain. What you may not be aware of is the fact that the size and complexity of the City's fleet has expanded dramatically. For example, the total number of vehicles in the Department of Sanitation went from 5,984, in 2011, to currently 7,050. Alarming however, the number of auto mechanics employed by Sanitation has not increased commensurately. Prior to the consolidation of

Fleet services, Sanitation had 529 auto trades. After consolidation, Sanitation picked up an additional 1066 vehicles but only got 31 auto trade workers. Of the 31, 13 retired and Parks Dept. was to transfer 11 personnel, but none were transferred. Currently there are only 575 auto trade personnel in Sanitation. Based on widely accepted industry standards for staffing auto repair and maintenance operations published in Government Fleet, most notably known as Maintenance and Repair Unit (MRU) factors, Fleet Services is short 208 auto trade workers. Common sense tells us this deficiency in staffing can only lead to failure. This same type of understaffing also plays out in the FDNY and NYPD.

The out-of-service rate of City vehicles proves beyond measure that Fleet Services is a disaster waiting to happen. The hand-out I am providing you contains a DCAS report from 2019, titled "Work order length of time open by work order agency", which indicates the number of vehicles and days they are out of service by City Agency/Department. I will refer to this report as the "Work Order Report." Oddly, the DCAS Fleet Services report indicates the Department of Sanitation has a fleet of vehicles of 1585. However, a separate DCAS report titled NYC Fleet Daily Service Report: Critical Fleet Summary, indicates over 2,000 vehicles, not including street sweepers. The inconsistent fleet size numbers should raise suspicion.

The significance of these differences impacts the vehicle out-of-service rates. I suspect DCAS is trying to paint a rosier picture than reality. What is important to understand is that the Sanitation Department reports a vehicle is out-of-service as soon as it breaks down and cannot be operated. Which makes sense as the vehicle is not able to used. However, DCAS reports the out-of-service date, not when the vehicle breaks down and cannot be operated, but the date it is placed in the work bay of a City garage or a private vendor which gives the perception of a lower out-of-service rate. This is obviously wrong, deceiving and needs to be corrected. It seems clear to me and my members that the out-of-service rate must be for the entire time the vehicle cannot be operated.

The out-of-service rate is important because, for example, in Sanitation there are approximately 450 Collection trucks out of service daily, which is approximately 20% of the collection vehicles. Further, DCAS has reported that 165 vehicles are out of service for over 60 days. I submit to you the reason for this long delay is that the parts needed for repair are not available. And the agency does not have enough auto mechanics to keep up with the work. I will testify about hiring later.

DCAS Fleet Services has attempted to address the poor of out-of-service rate by ordering agencies to send vehicles to outside vendors for repairs. My members have informed me that often times the equipment is returned to fleet services without being repaired properly. As a result, my members have had to repair the work the City has already paid an outside vendor to do. For example, prior to the last significant snow storm, Sanitation took the unprecedented step of sending many salt spreaders to outside vendors despite warnings by my union that private sector mechanics are not qualified to perform this work. Sadly, our warnings proved true. During that storm, a significant number of salt spreaders which were sent out to outside vendors for repair broke down because they were not serviced properly. Needless to say, this compromised public safety. It was a waste of taxpayer dollars as my auto mechanics had to repair the work the City already paid to have done. And it impacts the out-of-service rates of critical equipment.

DCAS Fleet Services has also taken the ill-advised approach of implementing a plan to replace auto mechanics with auto services workers. While I also represent the auto service worker title, it is a fact that the title does not provide the skills, training and experience necessary to repair and maintain the City's vastly diverse fleet. Auto service workers basically serve as a helper to the auto mechanic. While this is a critical and important role, there is no mistaking the fact that the two titles are not interchangeable. Auto service workers cannot do the work of an auto mechanic and cannot be expected to do so with any success. DCAS Fleet Services' decision to backfill auto mechanics with auto service workers will further increase the out-of-service rates to dangerous

levels. It will not save any money as that title is not able to perform the work of an auto mechanic. As the saying goes, “penny wise, pound foolish.”

Make no mistake about it, I want my auto service workers to have a career path to becoming an auto mechanic. Not to be thrown into a job that are not properly trained to perform at half the pay of an auto mechanic. Provide my auto service workers with training to become auto mechanics and then promote them to the title. That is a solid way to create a true career path and a successful model to building a professional repair workforce. It would also help to further diversify the workforce.

Further impacting out-of-service rates is the lack of adequate facilities to service the fleet. For example, the Department of Sanitation’s Central Repair Shop is being overhauled and there is a need for additional space to work on vehicles. I am informed DCAS is in charge of leasing space and that DCAS has not signed-off on leasing additional facilities. The lack of adequate repair facilities also increases the out-of-service time as the number of service bays is being reduced to unacceptable levels.

Another reason for high out-of-service rates is the lack of supplies to make necessary repairs. The City contracted with Genuine Parts/ NAPA to supply parts for all City Vehicles. I urge this committee to review the Genuine Parts/NAPA contract. I am informed by some of my members that the parts are not arriving on time and frequently the wrong parts are delivered causing a further delay in getting the vehicles back in service.

It is important to note that I am also informed by my members that this vendor is not complying with the contractual time periods in which to deliver the requested parts. There is no oversight to ensure the vendor is in compliance with its City contract or if the City demanded and/or received the agreed upon penalties if the contract is breached for the late delivery of supplies.

I also want to highlight that I believe that NAPA has instituted quotas and sales goals to its employees serving in City facilities. I believe that this for-profit sales program will result in wasteful and unnecessary City costs for parts. I urge the City Council to further investigate this sales practice.

I am further informed that a Director and Chief in the Department of Transportation visited two NYCDOT Fleet Services Repair facilities on Webster Ave. in the Bronx and Maspeth Queens. Deficiencies that were found in the Bronx facility demonstrate a gross mismanagement of the tire room that has led to an unusual and inefficient tire supply chain, unavailable truck parts and uncontrolled access to bolts and nuts. I am further informed these DOT officials reported that in Maspeth, there was a lack of established oversight for documentation of part charges.

Even when the City does decide to hire an auto mechanic, the process is so cumbersome and slow that the ability to maintain staffing levels is compromised. For example, if there is a civil service list, those on the list are hired in accordance with civil service law. If the list is expired, then a person can be provisionally hired. After 30 days, if any position is not filled, the process must start over again. This process takes a long time and the requisite number of auto trade workers is not being replaced in a timely manner.

Proof of this failure to hire timely is the fact that in the Department of Sanitation, 75 auto trades personnel retire each year. The current process does not result in the timely replacement of those members that retired. Further, the Police Department's hiring process may take up to six months.

I would like to point out that the staffing currently in effect at the Department of Sanitation is unsafe. On the night tours in 39 districts there is only one auto trade worker on duty for an entire shift in these garages. It is clearly unproductive and unsafe to have one auto trade worker to be alone doing maintenance work. In some cases, the maintenance work requires two workers. Being alone results in he/she cannot do their job. If the auto trade worker is

underneath a vehicle changing oil or working on brakes and the vehicle falls on him there is no one around to help him or call for help.

We should all be concerned that the public is at risk if a Fire Department ladder, pumper or ambulance or a Police vehicle cannot get to the emergency in a timely manner because of uncleared roads during a snow storm. Clearly the public expects and deserves that the City can clear the streets of snow by having the necessary equipment available. For example, in 2016 to 2020, Department of Sanitation added 248 pieces of snow equipment which would have necessitated and additional 28 mechanics to adequately service this new equipment. Shockingly, Sanitation was not able to hire any new personnel. If our First responders cannot navigate City streets during a snow storm, the public is put at risk.

I have been telling the City, DCAS and anyone else who would listen that fleet consolidation was built to fail. And I am sorry to say it has. I think if you were able to get the commissioners of the line agencies to tell you what they honestly feel and not what the party line is, they will tell you it simply is not working. While you have heard me point out the problems, I am also here to offer some solutions.

1. Revamp the reporting of all areas covering fleet services to ensure accurate uniform reporting of out-of-service rates.
2. Properly track the ordering of parts and the delivery to ensure a vendor is meeting its contractual obligations to deliver on time. And if they are not, the City can be compensated for a breach of the contract.
3. Independent auditing of DCAS reports to ensure they are truthful and accurate.
4. Eliminate the use of outside vendors for repair and maintenance.
5. Hire additional auto mechanics to meet the industry-wide standards for staffing levels for auto repair and maintenance.

6. Ensure that quarterly civil service examinations for all auto trades titles are administered so that there will always be a list of qualified personnel which will eliminate the need for provisional hires.
7. Ensure safe staffing on all shifts.
8. Require DCAS to lease additional space to meet the needs of the City.
9. Establish a formal training program for auto service workers so that there is a true career path for those who wish to advance themselves. It will also address the shortage of mechanics.

As President of SEIU Local 246 and a Chair of the MLC Civil Service Committee, I stand ready to assist in resolving the issues that we have brought up today. Thank you,