

Testimony for the Record

Fire Chief
Dennis L. Rubin



The Fire Apparatus Crisis
Facing America

Testimony for the Record

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee “Sounding the Alarm: America’s Fire Apparatus Crisis”

Wednesday, September 9, 2025

**Prepared by Dennis L. Rubin, Fire Chief
Kansas City Kansas Fire Department**

Senator Josh Hawley, Chair, Ranking Member Senator Andy Kim, and Members of the Disaster Management Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to appear and to participate in today’s hearing. I appreciate all of you for taking time from your very busy schedules to discuss the status of the current national fire apparatus crisis that includes pricing, delivery time, and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) repair parts availability.

I have served as the Fire Chief with several urban Fire Departments to include Atlanta, Georgia; Washington, DC; and at my current assignment in Kansas City, Kansas. As the Chief of Department, I have the responsibility to purchase as well as the oversight for the repair and maintenance of fire trucks. Today, my goal is to bring an emerging and unacceptable situation to this Committee’s attention that is having a serious negative impact on the health, safety, welfare, and security of our firefighters, on our community, and on most communities in America. Fire apparatus costs have skyrocketed along with the escalating delivery time to receive a new fire truck and the lack of availability of fire apparatus repair parts in the post-COVID era. Each of these situations negatively affect the ability to deliver high quality lifesaving, property protection, and other related safety and security services offered by local fire departments. Federal Government oversight, controls, and enforcement to resolve this problem should be considered. Public safety services are the bedrock of every community in this great nation. Delays in fire apparatus procurement and repairs threaten the ability of fire departments to perform our sworn duty to our communities.

I would like to use the Kansas City Kansas Fire Department (KCKFD) as a typical example of the duties and responsibilities of a modern-day urban fire department anywhere in our great Nation. The KCKFD currently operates eighteen (18) Fire Stations to protect a standing population of 153,345¹ residents, along with countless people in our commuter work force, and visitors that swell our population every single day. The land area that we are the primary protectors of is approximately 128 square miles of response area. KCKFD is responsible to provide emergency services to a large heavy industrial area that includes multifuel tank farms, a General Motors automobile manufacturing plant, a pet food processing plant, and a candle manufacturing plant to name just a few of these very high hazard facilities. KCK is home to one of America’s largest rail hubs with dozens of freight trains traveling through our community every hour of the day and night. Buried underneath our soil are miles and miles of petroleum and natural gas pipelines supplying the entire region with vital resources. There are over 100 miles of

¹ According to the Kansas City Kansas Chamber of Commerce

interstate highways (I-35; I-70; I-435; I-635; and I-670) inside of the City limits² adding many thousands of vehicles that use our highways each day.

Our Fire Department is designed to be an all hazards fire department capable of handling nearly every type of emergency incident that we are confronted with to resolve. Our primary mission includes responses to emergency medical, fire, rescue, and hazardous materials incidents. KCKFD will be called on to perform our duties over 37,000 times in 2025 with an ever-increasing workload of about 4% every year. Another measurement is that KCKFD will handle just over 100 responses per day.

Local community protection responsibilities are immense and very challenging, requiring ample resources, such as firefighting equipment and trained personnel to meet the public's demands. KCK is not a unique urban city, in that it controls very limited financial capacity to do all of the work of the people. Most urban cities continuously face similar challenges. In order to deliver services that our constituents need and demand, a fire department must have effective, efficient, reliable, functional, and safe fire apparatus to perform our duties for our community. That brings us to the purpose of my comments at today's meeting, the fire apparatus crisis that is facing American Fire Departments.

The current generation of fire chiefs are witnessing, with seemingly little reaction, an epic fire apparatus crisis unfolding without much pushback. There must come a day of reckoning when the manufacturers of our most important tools are held accountable for runaway pricing and extended delivery times. This problem seems to continue to spiral out of control and I feel obligated to offer a reasonable solution. It is time for external controls to be put into place to ensure that fire departments can provide the resources that are mission critical to solve safety related problems within their community.

Unreasonable price hikes coupled with build/delivery time frames of three to five years (fire apparatus delivery times were between 12–18 months pre-pandemic to as much as 24–60 months post-pandemic) to deliver the most basic elements of community fire and emergency protection is not acceptable. Both the escalating pricing along with the delivery times makes municipal budgeting very difficult to impossible to manage. Further, replacement parts are not readily available to make the needed repairs to keep *Big Red* on community watch. Repair parts are purchased by the largest fire apparatus manufacturers from other specialty manufacturers (e.g., transmissions and other power train parts). By simply slapping on the fire apparatus manufacturer's part number and label, the repair parts get an instant price increase to the consumer. With a simple re-labeling, these repair parts become original equipment manufacturer (OEM) parts. The extra shipping and handling steps add a significant time delay and cost to repair fire apparatus along with increasing local government financial stress.

Learning of the 100+ LAFD fire trucks that were waiting for repairs during one of the worst disasters in that City's history, the question of why there were so many broken fire trucks, must be asked and answered. Could the manufacturer's inflated pricing, delivery times, or OEM parts restrictions be the primary or a significant contributing cause of this epic failure, at the most inopportune time in wildfire history?

² According to Kansas Department of Transportation

Fire chiefs, fire service organizations, and governmental leaders need to demand accountability from the fire apparatus manufacturers. Runaway price increases, unreasonable delivery windows, and the shell game dealing with replacement parts must be fixed to allow our industry to continue to successfully operate. After this “federal sunlight session” there needs to be clear and enforceable manufacturing guidelines to watch over all three of these and any other unrealistic issues that emerge. It appears that corporate greed fuels these newly formed manufacturer’s behaviors. Congress should consider controls to provide guidance to prevent future systemic failures, making fire apparatus pricing and delivery time reasonable, once again.

The reoccurring argument by fire apparatus manufacturers for these cost spikes and the apparatus delivery delays offered by the manufactures is the fire service wants too many “custom” accoutrements. Perhaps the future holds three distinct fire truck assembly lines. One for urban cities and a second line for suburban/rural communities with these two assembly lines being standardized as much as possible, offering very few options. Pricing and delivery times could be refined and controlled much better than the current manufacturer’s driven process. The third assembly line would be the “boutique” assembly line, where everything from custom paint with an unlimited color pallet and as many “custom bells, whistles and frills” can be purchased adding to the price and increasing delivery time.

History reflects that, Henry Ford was once quoted in 1922 as saying, “Any color the customer wants, as long as it’s black.”³ Ford’s comment was in line with paint durability and to control the cost of the finished Model T’s price point to be competitive in the marketplace. Where is Henry Ford when you need him?

A Kansas City Kansas Fire Department Case Study

During the months of June, July, and August of 2023, the Kansas City Kansas Fire Department experienced serious disruptions to our fire suppression and emergency medical response capabilities. Five (5) of fifteen (15) fire truck pumpers were out of service in need of significant repairs and unavailable for response duty. Our response system disruption was caused by an extended delay in obtaining OEM repair parts from the manufacture. With the City’s fire and response capacity reduced by 33%, our delivery of fire and emergency medical services was seriously and unnecessarily impaired. Replacing a standard triple combination pumper were fire department Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV). The reduction of service delivery is obvious and the responding fire fighters would wait on location for a pumper with the correct equipment to arrive to provide emergency medical care and to extinguish fires. This is not a satisfactory emergency response model for any community.

In response to our operational deficiencies, KCKFD initiated an urgent search for replacement fire apparatus, either new or used fire trucks to bolster our failing fleet and to restore operational readiness. KCKFD began by exploring the used fire apparatus market by searching online listings, contacting used fire truck dealers, and directly contacting other fire departments across the country that may have used vehicles available for resale. To our disbelief, there were

³ James Madison Museum of Orange County Heritage, Feb. 15, 2023 edition

no viable candidate vehicles for sale after a three-week intensive search.

Next, we conducted a nationwide inquiry with all major manufacturers to identify any new apparatus available for immediate delivery. None of the major manufacturers had fire apparatus units on hand for immediate sale. After another week of exhaustive searching, we learned that the US Fire Apparatus Company in Holden, Louisiana had four new fire trucks in stock that were available for immediate purchase. This very rare opportunity allowed KCKFD to act swiftly and stabilize its fleet with minimal delay by purchasing three of the four ready-to-go fire trucks.

The three fire trucks were purchased using the emergency authority of the County Administrator. This was a mid-budget year procurement. Our newly acquired fire apparatus is designed for rural fire protection versus the urban environment of Kansas City, Kansas. Not our best option, but this action solved our immediate need. With the three newly acquired pumping fire engines, KCKFD was able to shore up our response fleet and return to our standard response operations.

Current Status

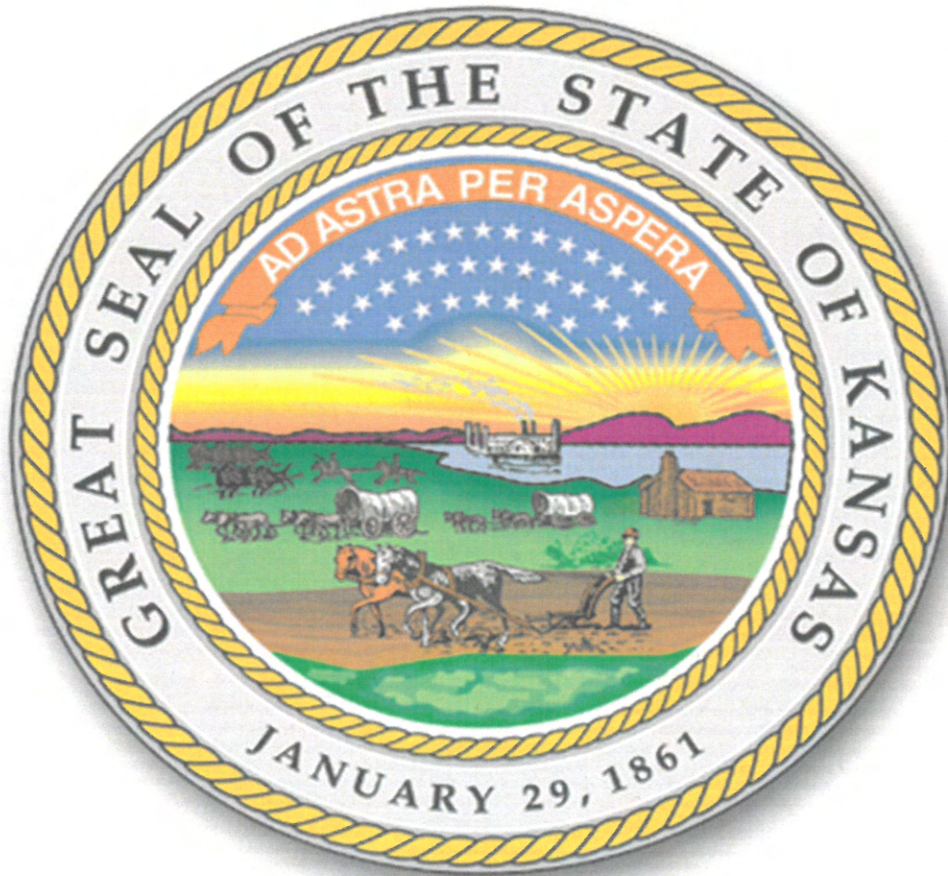
After going through this experience, the question must be asked: how would a local fire department replace a fire truck that was involved in a crash or any other problem that would render it unusable for an extended time? The wait of three to five years for a replacement is unacceptable. Any fire department would have a very difficult problem to solve to continue to protect their community.

Finally, the actual apparatus purchasing experience by KCKFD demonstrates a dramatic percentage increase in both price and delivery time. Prior to the COVID pandemic that began in March of 2020, the average price of a pumper purchased by KCKFD was \$627,555 and the average delivery time was 10 months. Since the beginning of the pandemic the current price of a pumper apparatus has increased by 36.6 percent to \$857,500 and the delivery time has more than doubled to 29 months.

Apparatus	Order Date	Delivery Date	Base Price	Base Price % Change Year to Year	Total Purchase Price w/Options	Months to Delivery	Delivery Time % Change Year to Year
Pumper*	12/29/2016	12/20/2017	\$487,569.00		\$670,411.00	11	
Pumper*	2/3/2017	12/20/2017	\$487,569.00	0%	\$670,411.00	10	-9%
Pumper*	7/27/2018	7/26/2019	\$416,850.00	-15%	\$589,870.00	11	10%
Pumper*	2/27/2019	12/12/2019	\$439,231.00	5%	\$579,530.00	9	-18%
Pumper*	1/31/2020	4/29/2021	\$492,768.00	12%	\$611,204.00	14	56%
Pumper*	1/28/2022	2/26/2024	\$530,667.00	8%	\$702,694.00	24	71%
Pumper*	2/3/2023	7/11/2025	\$671,796.00	27%	\$857,500.00	29	21%
The percentage increase in base pricing from 2017 to 2023 was 38%							
*Similar build specifications							
COVID Pandemic = March 2020 through May 2023							

I will close by pointing out the views express today are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Kansas City Kansas Fire Department, the City of Kansas City Kansas, or that of Wyandotte County, Kansas. Thank you, once again for allowing me the time to express this ever-growing concern about America's Fire Apparatus Crisis.

Kansas State Representative
Lynn Melton



Letter of Support
to
Senator Josh Hawley

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September 4, 2025

Senator Josh Hawley
212 Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington DC 20510

LYNN MELTON
36TH DISTRICT

Dear Senator Hawley:

I would first like to say Thank You for recognizing this critical problem and for reaching out to KCKFD Chief Dennis Rubin. I have also reached out to Representative Sharice Davids Office, and they are included in this correspondence.

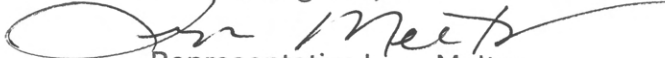
Recently I have had several conversations with Chief Rubin, and he has expressed the same concerns you have expressed. Chief Rubin has stated he has waited years to receive ordered fire trucks, and corresponding equipment required just to keep his department ready. Waiting years for critical apparatus is not only frustrating- it is unsafe, unethical, and puts both firefighters and the public in harm's way.

Additionally, these same companies increase prices from the quoted price when ordered, to a much higher price by the time of delivery- recently up to 22% higher. This practice is unacceptable but also unethical when it is solely used for the purpose of profit. I am NOT willing to trade the safety of our first responders or the community for their profits.

Our first responders deserve the tools and equipment they need to do their jobs safely and effectively, without the burden of exorbitant costs and unnecessary delays.

As the Kansas State Representative for District 36, I stand with you in your efforts to hold these suppliers accountable. Please know that I am committed to offering my full support to help resolve this issue.

Kindest Regards,


Representative Lynn Melton
District 36
785-296-0424

CC: Congresswoman Sharice Davids
KCKFD Chief Dennis Rubin

Kansas State Association of Fire Chiefs



Letter of Support

Kansas State Association of Fire Chiefs

Office of the President

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Milford, NE 68405

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July 29, 2025

To the Honorable Members of the Kansas Congressional Delegation,

The Kansas fire service is facing an increasingly unsustainable challenge—one that threatens the reliability of our emergency response and the safety of the people we serve. On behalf of the Kansas State Association of Fire Chiefs (KSAFC), I respectfully ask for your leadership and attention to an issue that has grown into a national crisis: the availability, affordability, and timely delivery of fire apparatus and parts.

In the past, departments could rely on a reasonably competitive market, predictable costs, and reliable build times. Today, that landscape has shifted dramatically:

- In 2016, my department purchased a well-equipped fire engine for approximately \$600,000. This year, a significantly simpler unit cost \$1.2 million—double the cost in under a decade.
- Our neighbors in smaller towns are attempting to rebuild 30-year-old ladder trucks in-house or purchase used rigs for refurbishment, because a \$2 million replacement is simply out of reach.
- A major metropolitan department in Kansas has faced delivery delays of up to five years and was recently forced to purchase the only four available rigs in the country—because those were the only units left.

At the same time, fire apparatus are failing sooner. One of our engines—with only 85,000 miles—is undergoing a full overhaul, likely due to emission-related system issues that were not problems a generation ago.

And it gets worse: many manufacturer contracts now include “floating” pricing clauses, forcing municipalities to accept cost escalations months—or years—after orders are placed. This is a serious concern when dealing with taxpayer dollars and capital improvement budgets that are often locked in years in advance.

We believe the consolidation of the fire apparatus industry—now dominated by just a few large companies—may have contributed to reduced competition, skyrocketing costs, lengthy delivery delays, and diminished parts availability. Departments of every size, from volunteer to full-time,

are being forced into untenable positions: running aging apparatus, borrowing rigs from neighbors, or going without.

We respectfully request that Congress:

1. Convene a formal inquiry or hearing into the state of the fire apparatus manufacturing industry—focusing on pricing practices, parts availability, and delivery times.
2. Engage the Federal Trade Commission and Department of Justice to review the competitive landscape and assess whether anti-competitive practices are at play.
3. Explore legislative safeguards that prevent predatory contract clauses from exploiting departments with no viable alternatives.

This is not just a matter of dollars and cents—it is a public safety issue. When rigs are sidelined or unavailable, our ability to respond is compromised. Mutual aid systems strain, response times increase, and the safety of our citizens and firefighters is jeopardized.

Fire departments in Kansas and across the country are doing their part—we're stretching every tax dollar, adapting and adjusting—but we need accountability and transparency in the system that supplies our most essential tools.

We stand ready to support you in this effort and to provide any data or perspective from the fire service that may assist in your work.

With respect and shared purpose,

Chad A. Russell

President, Kansas State Association of Fire Chiefs

Battalion Chief
Adam Patterson



Letter of Support



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FIRE CHIEF

ERIN STILLWAGON
PUBLIC SAFETY
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

COOPER WILSON
INTERIM TRAINING CHIEF

GENE ROBERTSON
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September 5, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Adam Patterson and I am writing to address a significant concern regarding the alarming delays in the delivery of fire trucks, which are now reported to be extending from three to five years from the date of order. This situation poses serious challenges for not just the Garden City Fire Department, but fire departments across the nation and the communities they serve.

Having grown up in rural Sublette, Kansas, a community of just 1,400 people, I understand firsthand the unique challenges that small towns face when it comes to fire protection. I began my career as a volunteer firefighter in 2007 before working part-time in Manhattan, Kansas from 2009–2010 while attending school, and later transitioning to a full-time firefighter role in 2011 after graduating from Hutchinson Community College's Fire Science program. These experiences, spanning both rural and urban settings, have shown me how critical it is for departments of every size to have timely access to reliable equipment. For rural fire departments in particular, delays in receiving apparatus can mean the difference between a successful response and a devastating loss. This is why ensuring that all departments—especially those serving small, resource-limited communities—are represented in this discussion is deeply important to me.

The Garden City Fire Department, located in Garden City, Kansas, is an all-hazards response department that covers not only the city of Garden City, but the entire 1302 square mile Finney County. The department has three stations with 55 personnel. This response area includes one of the "Golden Triangle" beef packing plants that produces roughly 23% of the beef in the nation and a large dry powder milk facility that sells to some of the world's top food producers. Additionally, our regional airport has services to Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport with commercial flights daily that require Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) certified personnel to provide coverage for every commercial flight. Most of all, we are surrounded by miles and miles of farm ground that produce some of the nation's top crops.

With the recent extended time for fire truck delivery times, our small community is at a crossroads. We opened our third station a mere three months ago. Our orders were placed for trucks almost two years ago, yet we have no new fire trucks that belong to the station. You may wonder why that matters; To be fully functional out of all three stations, we must move apparatus from our other two stations to fulfill the roles in our new station. This means our apparatus and resources are stretched thin as we try to serve our community and its people. We are left with only three reserve apparatus that can run as a backup when any truck goes down for maintenance issues or until we receive the new apparatus. The apparatus for the new station includes a 100' platform, 750-gallon Engine and a Brush Truck meant to service the entire east side of the city and county. While three backup trucks may sound sufficient, our fleet is aging faster than it can be replaced and it's rare that we don't have at least one primary response apparatus out of service.



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Our three reserve trucks are significantly outdated and present growing challenges. The first is a 1989 four-person open cab with no safety features, where the two firefighters in the rear sit directly against the motor, with no communication to the officer in charge and no way to hear radio traffic. The second is a 1993 75' Quint, which has limited safety features on the ladder, a reduced weight capacity for rescues from multi-story buildings, and an increasingly obsolete pump that makes parts difficult and time-consuming to source. The third is a 2006 commercial chassis with a five-person cab and over 100,000 miles. It suffers from recurring electrical problems that make it unreliable. Despite these issues, all three reserve trucks must remain operational to meet our community's needs until newer apparatus can be acquired for the front line.

The major problems that aren't being talked about are the financial strains that we are seeing and experiencing in communities, especially rural ones like ours. Governing bodies are put in spots where they have to make a choice on approving the purchase of a new apparatus, while having to explain to our community members that we are going to purchase an apparatus that is well over \$750,000 but it will not be delivered to service them or their family for anywhere up to five years from the approved purchase date.

Taking all of this into account, there are four major points I hope most people can understand:

1. **Increased Risk to Public Safety:** With older fire trucks being used for longer periods, the risk of mechanical failures increases. This can result in delayed response times during emergencies, potentially endangering lives and property.
2. **Financial Strain:** Fire departments often budget for new trucks based on projected timelines for delivery. Extended delays can disrupt these financial plans, leading to unforeseen expenses for maintenance and repairs on aging apparatus. This can ultimately divert funds away from other critical areas, such as operational tools and training.
3. **Operational Inefficiencies:** Fire departments rely on a fleet of vehicles to ensure quick and effective responses to emergencies. Delayed deliveries can lead to resource shortages, forcing departments to stretch their existing equipment beyond acceptable limits, which can compromise operational efficiency.
4. **Community Confidence:** The community relies on its fire department to respond promptly and effectively to emergencies. Delays in acquiring new equipment can erode public confidence in the department's ability to protect them, which is vital for community trust and support.

To help fire departments overcome these critical challenges, I urge you to actively advocate for solutions that accelerate the manufacturing and delivery of fire apparatus. This could involve working closely with fire truck manufacturers to identify and address the root causes of production delays, while also encouraging innovative approaches to streamline processes, improve supply chain efficiency, and prioritize the timely fulfillment of these essential vehicles. By fostering stronger collaboration and seeking practical, forward-thinking solutions, we can



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ensure that fire departments receive the equipment they need to protect lives and property without unnecessary delays.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Your dedication to ensuring that fire departments have the tools they need to serve and protect is deeply appreciated—not only for larger, urban agencies, but also for the countless rural departments that often face the greatest challenges in accessing timely resources. It is vital that rural fire departments are given a strong voice in these discussions, as their needs are equally urgent and their ability to respond directly impacts the safety of wide-reaching communities. I look forward to your response and any updates you can provide regarding actionable solutions that will support fire departments of every size across our nation.

I will close by pointing out the views express today are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Garden City Fire Department, the City of Garden City Kansas, or that of Finney County, Kansas.

Sincerely,

Adam Patterson
Battalion Chief
Garden City Fire Department