City of Cincinnati

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Betsy Sundermann
Cincinnati City Councilmember

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MOTION

WE MOVE that the Administration use available closeout dollars to first prioritize the funding of additional recruits for Fire Recruit Class #118 scheduled to start in September, 2021 and Fire Recruit Class #119 scheduled to start in April, 2022 to ensure that each of the class sizes reach the maximum of 60 recruits.

WE FURTHER MOVE that the Administration continue to pursue SAFER grant funding opportunities when available to assist in offsetting the cost of these recruit classes.

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STATEMENT

Service demand on the Cincinnati Fire Department (CFD) has been increasing roughly 2.3 percent each year although the sworn strength has not been adjusted to cover the increased demands.

For the twelve months ending FY20, CFD's overtime costs were $3,437,641.67. Yet, for the six-plus months ending 01.05.2021 (FY21), overtime costs totaled $5,583,965.56 revealing a growing use of overtime by the department.

The citizens of Cincinnati have consistently placed public safety as a very high priority in their expectations for city services. Adequate funding for fire protection is critical to providing these services. Currently, the budget for fire personnel and department expenses is being heavily challenged by COVID-19 and attrition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the use of additional overtime to meet staffing and service requirements. Sick leave has increased due to COVID-19 diagnoses, exposure, or mandatory quarantine periods required while waiting for test results. COVID-19 related sick leave has been further exacerbated by the close living and working conditions of sworn staff in fire houses.

Additionally, attrition in the first quarter of FY21 has trended 200% higher than expected due to unanticipated separations. Several separations are attributed to medic unit staff burnout, which has increased since the start of COVID-19. Attrition tends to accelerate in the first quarter and then curtails in quarters two through four. If attrition trends do not curtail, the department will require additional overtime to backfill vacant positions.

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Fire anticipates approximately 12.0 FTE to retire in FY22 and 31.0 FTE to retire in FY23. These figures do not include unanticipated retirements or other types of employment separation. As noted above, attrition has increased during COVID-19. These trends may continue in FY22. Additionally, the department has noticed that sworn personnel enrolled in the Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP) do not stay the entire eight years of the program, further increasing unanticipated attrition.

The trajectory of overtime costs due to COVID-19 and attrition, compounded by increased demand for services, requires the city to prioritize its two recruit classes planned for the FY22 budget. CFD leadership believes that classes can handle up to 60 recruits each. It is critical that the sizes of Recruit Classes #118 and #119 be increased to their maximum levels. Closeout dollars should be prioritized to cover these costs not included in the FY22 budget.

Even though it will take time to get recruits trained and on the job, the rebuilding of the sworn strength of the Cincinnati Fire Department will address both the attrition and overtime crises our city and budget are facing and ensure that the citizens of Cincinnati receive the services required in a time of need.

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