



# Leading on the Front Lines: Crisis Leadership in Emergency Response and Healthcare

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## **Laura Kavanagh**

**Laura Kavanagh** spent two decades advising leaders through complex challenges until she became a leader herself, as the head of the nation's largest fire department. Her views on leadership are shaped by her unusual path to it, from a shy and reserved child growing up in a small rural town, to leading a public institution of 17,000 employees with a \$2.3 billion budget through 24/7 crises. Laura spent the first half of her career working on local, congressional, mayoral, and presidential campaigns and advising leaders at all levels of government, in particular, first-time candidates. Her desire to see deeper institutional change brought her to government. As an executive at the FDNY for almost eight years before becoming Commissioner, she led through the city's most challenging times: a worldwide pandemic, natural disasters, mass casualty events and fiscal crises. She was at the forefront of modernizing the agency through technology innovation and that made the agency more transparent, efficient, and effective. Her work and advocacy brought historic investments in the FDNY and the first responder workforce. Due to these years in the trenches, she would be appointed the 34th FDNY commissioner, the first woman to lead the male-dominated institution and the youngest in more than a century. Since leaving city government in 2024, Laura has focused

on speaking, writing, and mentoring on women's leadership, serves as a distinguished fellow at NYU, and is completing her first novel.



## **Lori A. Escallier, Ph.D., RN CPNP-PC, FAAN**

**Dr. Lori Escallier** serves as Dean of the College of Nursing at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, where she leads one of the institution's largest academic units and oversees the preparation of frontline healthcare professionals. She directs nursing education programs that support clinical excellence, workforce development, and healthcare delivery across diverse communities.

As Dean, Dr. Escallier advances initiatives focused on workforce readiness, student success, accreditation standards, and expanding pathways into the nursing profession. Her leadership strengthens academic and clinical systems that prepare nurses to serve in complex, high-stakes healthcare environments.